

A COMMUNITY ADDRESSES CONFLICT BY ENGAGING THE BIBLE TO
INFORM SPIRITUAL PRACTICES THAT LEAD TO SPIRITUAL FORMATION,
WHICH REGENERATES THE COMMUNITY

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By

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ABSTRACT

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This project is to research the effect of spiritual formation formed through Bible engagement on the way in which a congregation encounters Conflict. The site is Jesse Lee United Methodist Church in Easton, Connecticut. This is a small suburban New England church with over 220 years of history.

By using different tools of research, I have tried to measure the impact of Bible engagement, which to discover spiritual disciplines to inform spiritual formation to encounter conflict within the congregation.

For the research following tools were applied: For quantitative data gathering congregational survey by US Congregational Life Survey was used. This survey helped gathered information regarding the use of spiritual disciplines and the understanding of spiritual formation in the congregation. Much of the research required qualitative data and these informations were gathered through use of research tools such as, focus group discussion, interviews, reaction to the Bible study, daily devotional, and sermons.

The key terms used in this study are: community, conflict, Bible engagement and spiritual formation.

While the survey data did not show major changes in the spiritual formation of the congregation, other qualitative research revealed that change did occurred.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

How did I get here?

I never intended to become an expert in conflict resolution. I remember attending a program at Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington DC and found that one of the participants in the program focused her topic on the conflict in Middle East. This may be the first time I have learned that there is such a field of study as Conflict Resolution. Until then, I was not aware that one could actually study conflict.

We all experience conflict in our lives, even though we may not remember being in such a situation. For some people, conflict is only thought of in terms of political or organizational strife. But the day we emerge from our mother's womb we enter into a world in conflict. We think of a mother's womb as a haven of peace. But the world we live in is often cold, disconnected, and riddled with personal and relational struggles. This is just a beginning of our experience of conflict. Seldom do we interpret these struggles as conflict. Also, an infant may forget early experiences of conflict and struggle as the warm embrace of a mother's care comforts her or him. As such, when we experience conflict we may not see it as a conflict when it is resolved to everyone's satisfaction.

After twenty years of working in different types of ministry, I have learned that conflict is unavoidable. As the saying goes, "If you can't beat them, then join them." So, my journey toward learning about conflict began and I started to research into conflict resolution.

My First Pastorate in Deeply Troubled Church

My first experience with a church in conflict was also my first pastorate. As I was about to graduate from seminary, a professor who was also a pastor of a Korean United Methodist Church approached me to work with this congregation. This was a Korean immigrant church and had the third longest history among Korean churches in the United States. The congregation was the first Korean church located on the East coast. I was to be in charge of a group of second-generation Koreans who were more comfortable with the American culture than Korean culture. While the second-generation group functioned as an independent congregation, they were chartered under the first-generation congregation who was also responsible for managing its finances and administration. Many leaders in the second-generation congregation were leaders in the community too. To give a few examples, one of the members was vice-president of a company while another was junior partner at large law firm in New York City. Yet, they could not organize themselves to become an independent congregation. They did not like being under the government of the first-generation congregation. The first-generation group was under very stressful and intense conflict. Members were angry at each other and started a lawsuit against each other. All this was going on before I began my ministry at the church. While I worked with the second-generation group, I was hired by the first-generation congregation and was considered their associate pastor. Therefore, I had to attend their church conference each month where I found myself physically ill due to the emotional stress during the meeting. After two years of trying to work with the group I have found myself leaving the parish.

Entering the second parish that just came out of a conflict.

There was a two-year gap between my first and second parish assignments. This time, I was entering a parish that had just come through a highly intense conflict. It is unclear why the conflict rose in this congregation. I was told that the congregation split into two parties, pro-pastor and anti-pastor. They had a female pastor for the first time and she led the congregation to growth with an average of 145 attending each Sunday. However, the attendance started to go down and the congregation became unhappy with the pastor and two parties began to form. The congregation brought in a group called “Parish Network Consultant.” This was a group trained to help congregations in conflict to find resolution. However, the method they had used caused much pain and the process hurt the members. Yet, some work by the consultant helped as the congregation was eager to keep the church alive. I began a ministry of listening: I visited people who were hurt and began to listen to their stories and to be with them. The congregation was excited about the new future and they were able to turn the church around.

However, once they gained a certain level of financial and membership stability, the practices that led them into the previous conflict started again. People made phone calls to conspire and spread sentiments of dissatisfaction with the pastor. Alliances formed and favors were granted to help people gain support for their position. I left after six years of ministry at this parish. When my announcement about leaving the church was made those who came to love me were upset that they were not included in the discussion. There were feelings of hurt and betrayal.

Going from one betrayal to another.

The next parish I entered was in mourning as they said good-bye to a pastor whom served with them in ministry for 12 years. The pastor was married to another

United Methodist Pastor. They were both very involved in the ministry. Not having extended family nearby, they had made their ministry their extended family. They even hosted Thanksgiving dinners to those who did not have any families to share Thanksgiving meals. While this seems like a sign of devotion of the pastor, some actions of the pastor led the congregation to depend too much on the pastor. Because I was not able to do all the things the previous pastor had done, such as hosting Thanksgiving dinner on the day of Thanksgiving, the congregation was lost as to how to handle the situation. They were willing to work out the situation but it was done with some resentment.

The comparison between the previous pastor and me did not stop as I became pregnant within seven months of being part of the church. Even after the birth of my child I was not able to live up to the way in which their previous pastor was available. As I was adjusting between being a mother and a pastor I also lost a nephew who was only eleven months old. As the congregation had to deal with the pastor who was in need of support of a faith community, the congregation decided that they no longer wanted me as their pastor. I found myself betrayed by a faith community when I needed the church the most. Despite the fact that I was still fulfilling most of my pastoral duties, the congregation became unhappy with a pastor who took time for self-care. When the situation intensified, I asked for help and brought in a mediator. However, it was clear that the congregation did not desire to resolve any differences and wished for a new pastor. Despite the work with the mediator to find space to listen to each other and work with each other the group of the leaders had already decided to end this relationship.

Even the mediator was confused by the result and could not explain how the conclusion was made.

Only by Faith

This led me to think about leaving the ministry. However, in my prayer for discernment I heard the voice of God telling me that there was a congregation who needed a pastor like me. This led me to my present congregation. In my entering the congregation I knew this was the church God has promised me. The church had just transition into a half-time appointment a couple of years before I entered ministry with them and it had experienced many losses. Despite its deteriorating condition, there were many good people who were holding the ministry together and desired to work to build up the ministry.

Immediately, the congregation and I began an exciting ministry. There was a lot of affirmation from the congregation regarding my pastoral presence. While I felt there was very little study I could do regarding conflict in the church, my heart was still wrestling with the role of conflict in the church. Then slowly, I began to hear stories of the past and to learn that this wonderful church that was full of wonderful people also has its conflicts.

The Town of Easton, CT.

When I was sent to Jesse Lee United Methodist Church to serve as their pastor, one of the first things I experienced was a response of those outside the area who knew the town or the county in which it is located. Often people were surprised that I was moving to a place known as a home to the financially well-to-do.

The town of Easton is located in Fairfield County, Connecticut. The county has a reputation for being the richest county in the state as several of its towns were named the

highest median family incomes in the country in 2008.¹ According to the Connecticut Economic Resource Center, as of 2011 the town of Easton has: a population of 7,625; 65% of the population has achieved education level of bachelor degree or higher; median household income was \$153,220; 260 of its residents commute to Manhattan, New York; and median age is 39. Its racial composition is as follows: White (6,968), Black (52); Asian Pacific (247); Native American (9); Other/Multi-Race (131); Hispanic (238).

In 1845 Easton incorporated as a town when it separated from Weston. Easton is unique in that it never had any one center for the town. Instead, little pockets of centers with one-room schools grew around within the town. With the incursion of the industrial revolution, these schools eventually closed, and Samuel Staple School opened in 1930. Jesse Lee was situated in one of these centers of the town.

On Center Street, where the town's volunteer fire department is located, there is one of the few stores in town, Village Store. About a mile away from the firehouse there is the town hall, police station, and library. Although Easton does not have a large population, its new elementary school building is one of the largest in the state. In contrast, the middle school building is half the size of elementary school; while it shares a high school with the neighboring town of Redding. The town's school system has a reputation for being one of the best in the state, and yet many residents invest in sending their children to private schools such as Fairfield Prep in Fairfield, CT.

There are also many town residents who lived in town long before upper middle-class families began to move in, purchasing homes at a median cost of \$580,000. The

¹ Althea Chang, "25 Top-Earning Towns: Wondering where the wealth is? Residents of these 25 places have the highest median family incomes in the country," *CNNMoney.com* 2008, http://money.cnn.com/galleries/2008/moneymag/0807/gallery.bplive_top earners.moneymag/index.html (accessed January 29, 2012).

town also has zoning laws requiring a minimum of 1 acre of land to build a house in the lower part of Easton and minimum of 3 acres of land in the upper part of Easton.

Easton does not allow additional commercial business in town except those that are already established before the zoning law. For example, when General Electric was looking to build their corporate office in Easton, they were turned down. In the end, GE built the corporate office on the border of Fairfield and Easton, but on the Fairfield side. This resulted in a loss of opportunity to increase tax revenue. Some of the residents regret this loss; however, there is no actual action to change.

This same zoning law does not allow for any supermarket or other retail stores to be present in the town and causes many of the residents to go outside of the town to shop for their everyday needs.

Despite the inconvenience of not having any retail stores in town, Easton had experienced a shortage of housing due to the demand of the people who desired to move into the town. One of the members of JLUMC told me he moved out of Easton due to a job opportunity in another state. Years later they came back to Easton and tried to find a house in town without success. As an alternative, they moved into a next town but continue their membership at JLUMC. For many years people who were willing to rent their homes benefited from this demand to live in Easton, which ended in 2011.

When I visited Easton for the first time in April of 2011, I was amazed that I could not find any “for sale” signs in the neighborhood, for there were many houses for sale in other parts of the state. Not long after I moved into the town, the “for sale” signs began to appear in the town. I then began to hear from some of the people I was meeting in town that they were forced to relocate out of Easton due to the high property taxes.

While the mill rate is not as high as some other cities and towns in the state, the rising property values made the taxes high due to an increase in assessment.

These occurrences made the congregation and me anxious. However, Jesse Lee Preschool, which was owned by the church, received many inquiries by families who bought these available houses and moved into the town. This was a hint that as the town population got older and moved out, young families who want the benefit of school system in Easton were moving in.

Jesse Lee United Methodist Church

Jesse Lee United Methodist Church is a historic church with over 220 years of history. In 1789 it became a Methodist class² through the work of Jesse Lee, a legendary Methodist Circuit Rider. From Methodist class it later became the first Methodist Church in New England.³

Methodism started as a movement within the Anglican Church in England by its priest, John Wesley and Charles Wesley. Because John Wesley had more influence in organizing the movement, he is often given the credit as “the founder of Methodism.” However, the historical record shows he never had any intention of starting a new denomination. Many historians believe that the American Revolution played climatic role in moving American Methodism into a denomination as it severed itself from England.

At the early stage of Methodism in American, John Wesley had commissioned people who were not ordained to be a preacher. These lay preachers, known as the Circuit

² When a group of people gather to practice Methodism it is designated as “Methodist class,” which becomes part of Methodist Society. Many of the Methodist churches were originated from these classes and societies.

³ William Barnes, “Jesse Lee: Pioneer of American Methodism,” lecture at Easton Historical Society, Easton, CT, July 29, 1976, 4.

Riders rode horses to different towns to promote the Gospels and Methodist way of life and faith. When a Circuit Rider was able to convert a group of people, then he formed a “class” that became a Methodist church.

Jesse Lee was commissioned by Bishop Francis Asbury to promote Methodist teachings to New England where he rode his horses from Connecticut to Maine.

Historians credit Jesse Lee for the growth of Methodism in New England.⁴ In addition, he was closely connected with government officials and served four terms as the head chaplain for the U. S. House of Representatives and one term as chaplain of the United States Senate. Ironically, his close involvement with government officials prevented him from becoming a bishop.⁵

The original church record of Jesse Lee Methodist Episcopal Church was burned during a house fire of the man who kept it, Edwin Godfrey. The current record available to the church is a reconstructed history by a long time member of the church, Nelson T. Hall and it only records until events of 1960.

In 1976 the Rev. William Barnes, former pastor of Jesse Lee, wrote an article titled “Jesse Lee: Pioneer of American Methodism.” This gives more detailed accounts of how Jesse Lee came to Norwalk that led to the establishment of the Methodist church in Easton. According to the article, the first church building was erected in 1795 on Park Avenue of Fairfield for worship. As the membership grew the building became too small for the members to meet and a plan to build on Flat Rock of Easton began. This plan was not approved by the whole congregation; those who did not agree with the location of the

⁴ Abel Stevens, *Introduction of Methodism into New England*, vol. 2 of *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1864), Book IV Chapter V, <http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyctr/books/0201-0300/stevens/0219-245.htm> (accessed February 2, 2014).

⁵ Barnes, “Jesse Lee,” 4.

move split off and built the First Methodist Church in Bridgeport, CT. This was the first recorded instance of conflict at Jesse Lee handled conflict, but not the last.

There were small but many more incidents of conflict for this first Methodist church. In 1813 the remainder of the congregation from Park Avenue was able to build the church and finished by mid-summer of 1813 and dedication was held on September 26, 1813.⁶ Then the second incident of conflict occurred during the pastorate of Stephen Martindale in 1832 with having a Bible cushion put in the pulpit. There was an opposition to this as some felt the sanctuary must be as plain as possible. The opposition was so great that within two weeks the cushion disappeared and its contents were found outside of the church ground.⁷

There were at least two more split-offs of the church before 1960. Each split created a “class” that turned into a church. Despite all these splits, Jesse Lee Methodist church grew. According to Rev. Bill Barnes, it was the church to attend in Easton. In our conversation he also commented how sad he is to see the declining Sunday school in comparison to his time in Easton. He said, “There used to be over 60 Sunday school children attending church.”⁸

Nevertheless, Jesse Lee is a historic church that struggled but kept its doors open. Due to the poor record keeping I am not able to gain data any further back than 2001. Thanks to the treasurer of the church, who kept the record from 2001 to 2012, I was able to do some data analysis as below:

⁶ Ibid. 3.

⁷ Nelson T. Hall, “Recollection of Jesse Lee Methodist Episcopal Church” (n. p.: Easton, CT, 1948), 8.

⁸ This was a quote from my informal conversation with him in year 2011.

- Until June 30, 2001 the church was served under Rev. Robert Knebel.
- From July 1, 2001 to June 30, 2004 the church was served under Rev. Don Kirkham and the average attendance went from seventy-seven to eighty-nine.
- From July 1, 2004 to June 30, 2006 the church was served under Rev. Dennis Winkleblack and the average attendance went from eighty-nine to seventy-three.
- From July 1, 2006 to June 30, 2009 the church was served under Rev. Ariel Ferrari and the attendance went from seventy-three to sixty.
- From July 1, 2009 to June 30, 2011 the church was served under Rev. George Engelhard and the attendance went from sixty to fifty-eight.
- From July 1, 2011 to present the church is served under Rev. Christine Kim and the attendance went from fifty-eight to sixty-one.

In relation to the decline of attendance the congregation also transitioned from a full-time pastor to half-time pastor. Currently, there are about thirty committed members of the church dedicated to rebuilding the church back to a full-time pastor church.

In addition to the decline in worship attendance, there was a major incident in 2008 that drained much of the energy from the leadership. Jesse Lee Preschool had a director who was hired by the church to serve as the director for the school. She had been part of the preschool for many years and gotten raises that resulted in \$50,000 a year salary. The school made a profit and was able to return \$18,000 to \$26,000 annually to the church from 2001 to 2008. However, when the enrollment decreased due to increased competition and decrease in birth rate, the preschool was no longer able to reimburse the church for its utility expenses. The church leaders started reflecting on the budget of the preschool. As a conclusion the church reviewed the director's salary and felt the church was no longer able to afford to keep the director and let go of the director. This led to litigation as well as much conflict with those who were involved in the preschool and the

church. The church tried to revitalize the preschool after the conflict by hiring a new director and promoting the school. Despite the inquiry by the new families that were moving in to the town, the preschool was unable to obtain enough students for enrollment, and had to shut down at the end of the school year 2011-2012.

In the midst of all the struggles and discouragements, the members of JLUMC are the people with faith and hope as they are determined to fulfill the will of God as stated in their vision and mission statement below:

The Vision Statement of Jesse Lee United Methodist Church (JLUMC) states, “Jesse Lee seeks to be a compassionate congregation whose members, through word and deed, live the Great Commission of Jesus Christ to ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and your neighbor as yourself.’”⁹

The Mission Statement of JLUMC states, “ *Our Mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ by: INVITING into our congregation all people of the surrounding communities and joyfully receiving all who respond; ENCOURAGING all people to strengthen their relationship with God; PROVIDING opportunities for all people to nurture and be nurtured through hope, healing, fellowship and Christian love; and ENCOURAGING AND SUPPORTING children, youth, and adults in their daily lives, to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ.* ”¹⁰

Yet, the people at JLUMC do not have a consensus on how they might become such a community. The authors of *Reframing Organizations*, Lee G. Bolman and

⁹ www.jesselee.org

¹⁰ Ibid.

Terrence E. Deal state that in an organization “Conflict is natural and inevitable” and “Change invariably creates conflict.”¹¹

JLUMC is an organization that deals with scarcity of resources, enduring differences and interdependence while serving a community that is also going through parallel changes. There are many elements present at JLUMC for a rise of explosive conflict. By engaging the congregation of JLUCM with the Bible I plan to help them use spiritual discipline as a means to prepare them to embrace conflict as a path toward growth and renewal.

¹¹ Lee G. Bolman, and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 197, 376.

CHAPTER 2

PRELIMINARY ANALYSIS OF THE CHALLENGE

According to Thomas Porter, “Our transformation begins with our attitude toward conflict, the way we look at conflict and respond to conflict. Our attitude frames our response to conflict and determines whether it becomes destructive or constructive.”¹² Therefore, the way in which a person enters conflict can deliver different results. The conflicts facing JLUMC can become constructive experiences if the people approach conflict with an attitude of hope.

Richard Foster asserts that we live in a time where “superficiality is the curse of our age.”¹³ He then goes on to say, “The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people.”¹⁴

The “deep people” are those who seek to live a life of spiritual discipline that strengthens their relationship with God. As a result, they trust in God’s providence and their actions are opposite of the “negative attitude” as defined by Thomas Porter.¹⁵ It is a common response of people to be reactive when they encounter conflict. When in conflict, emotions drive the person to into flight/avoidance or fight/hostility.

¹² Thomas Porter, *The Spirit and Art of Conflict Transformation: Creating a Culture of Just Peace* (Nashville, TN: Upper Room, 2010), 11.

¹³ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: the Path to Spiritual Growth*, 20th anniversary ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 1.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

¹⁵ Thomas Porter defines “negative attitude” as “defensiveness, anxiety, and fear, and to the fight-or-flight response to the perceived threat.”

Bolman and Deal identify sources of conflict in organization as the “combination of scarce resources and divergent interests.”¹⁶ The divergent interests can be separated in two categories:

- “enduring differences” – “differences of values, beliefs, information, interests, and perceptions of reality among the people who are in a connection.”
- “interdependence.” – “coalitions of diverse individuals and interest groups.”¹⁷

JLUMC is a perfect example of how these elements play into their conflict.

As part of The United Methodist Church, JLUMC abides by a hierarchical system. Each church operates under the *United Methodist Discipline* and is part of what is called an annual conference,¹⁸ which is divided by a region. There are sixty-three annual conferences and fifty active United Methodist bishops in the United States. A bishop who serves a term of 4 years leads each conference. Each conference is subdivided into regions called “districts.” Each “district” has a district superintendent under the administration of a bishop. The Bishop and the district superintendents send a pastor to a church. Therefore, each church’s relationship with a district superintendent is very important as the local church is given limited input in choosing its pastor. The church can submit a desired profile of a pastor, but ultimately the bishop and district superintendents decide whom to send. Churches support the operations and ministry of the denomination

¹⁶ Lee G. Bolman and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 197.

¹⁷ Bolman and Deal, *Reframing Organizations*, 186.

¹⁸ In the United Methodist Church, the term “annual conference” can refer a regional body, an organizational unit, and yearly meeting. Here, I am referring to a regional body.

by paying a denominational fee called, an apportionment. This is based on the expenses of the church, part of which includes the pastor's compensation package.

The pastoral compensation package of a pastor includes: minimal salary schedule, professional reimbursement, health insurance, retirement fund, parsonage or housing allowance, utilities for the parsonage, and any maintenance involving up keep of the parsonage. If the pastor is given a half-time or less appointment, then the church is not responsible for health insurance. However, as long as the pastor is to live in the parsonage the congregation is responsible for maintaining the parsonage.

Enduring Difference and Scarcity of Resources:

As Bolman and Deal have stated, enduring differences and scarcity of resources are seedbeds for conflict. Conflict is a difference or differences between two or more members of a community where a barrier or barriers in communication hinder members from meeting their needs. An example of this definition is given by Gary T. Furlong in his book, *The Conflict Resolution Tool box*. In the introduction Furlong asks the reader to imagine having a new neighbor who loves to have a party with many guests over many nights of the week until the early hours of the morning. This keeps you up with the noise. You talk to your neighbor about this but he dismisses your concern with "Loosen up, have some fun. Come and join us if you want! You need to enjoy life more!" You are more upset after the conversation and you begin to think about how insensitive and uncaring your neighbor had been. Then, you begin to think that he is doing this in retaliation of your dog that barks every now and then, which he had about complained

once. This conclusion leads you to believe that the problem will not be solved unless you call the police next time the neighbor has the party during the week.¹⁹

In JLUMC, enduring differences and scarcity of resources are intertwined and the conflicts they cultivate are subtly embedded in the congregation's character and ways of being. There are enduring differences such as the building maintenance; traditional Sunday school program, fundraiser events, and preschool program are the things that the congregation is unable to support because of lack of funding and volunteers. Yet, the people at JLUMC feel that these are necessary things for the JLUMC to be a church.

The church has always relied on volunteers to function. There were many fundraisers by JLUMC that supplement the finance of the church. In 2002 fundraisers such as the tag sale and church suppers raised \$8,821.²⁰ Since then many of the fundraising events have been cancelled. In 2012 only one fundraiser was done to support the church budget. This was the annual Turkey Dinner where over 200 people attend each year. However, the amount raised was not enough to proficiently help the church budget and large amount of labor that exhaust those who volunteers.

In addition to the fundraisers to supplement income, JLUMC has had generous benefactors who often rose to the occasion and helped save the church from debt. One of the first recorded incidents took place in 1935 when the church built six classrooms on to the sanctuary. The project left the church with a debt of \$4,500. JLUMC was able to reduce the debt to \$2,500, but found the sum difficult to pay it off. A generous benefactor, Mrs. William Disbrow, paid the outstanding balance.

¹⁹ Gary T. Furlong, *The Conflict Resolution Toolbox: Models & Maps for Analyzing, Diagnosing, and Resolving Conflict* (Mississauga, Ont: J. Wiley & Sons Canada, 2005), 1.

²⁰ Appendix B. This was the highest amount raised from 2001 to 2012.

In recent years, there was a member who would help the church with large contributions for capital projects. When the church decided to borrow money to renovate part of the church, this person gave the amount as a contribution so that the church did not have to borrow money or launch a capital campaign. In addition, she has bailed out the congregation whenever there was a cash shortage. When the person passed away and the congregation had to renovate the church bell tower, this member's sister came to the rescue of the church and paid for the renovation.

Unable to gain more members to support the ministry at JLUMC, the leadership of JLUMC feels that more fundraisers are needed to raise money to support the ministry. However, not having enough people in the church where a majority of the members are approaching 70 or older, JLUMC is unable to plan any fundraisers. At each council meeting, finance meeting and trustee meeting there is talk of fundraisers with no actual plans to put into action.

The congregation also enjoyed multiple forms of pastoral support provided by members of the congregation. Some members recall Ken Halcott, an ordained pastor who left ministry to go into a secular job to support his family. As a member of JLUMC, he provided pastoral care by visiting people and teaching Bible studies. In addition, the congregation has a lay leader, Bruce Jaffe, whose presence is equal to an assistant pastor. He fills in for and supports the pastors of JLUMC. However, as of 2006 his health began to deteriorate and he had to reduce his church responsibilities for his well-being. As these lay leaders were not appointed as pastors, there is no recognition that the church lost more than a full time pastor in the pastoral ministry. Instead, there is a desire for a pastor who can become their savior and help them grow in membership and in finance.

In addition, JLUMC meets in a building that is over 200 years old. For many years the church relied on the volunteers to help with maintenance of the church. There was a group in the church who did repairs. However, the group became smaller and was left with two people by 2011. While the building has many structural faults such as not enough room for storage, unstable foundation, insufficiently utilized spaces, the congregation cannot think of abandoning the building. There is a thought that part of what makes JLUMC special is the charming New England church building.

The people of JLUMC have responded to conflicts with reactions of avoidance or hostility. For example, in 2005 the pastor announced to the congregation that he had accepted a position as the bishop's assistant and would be serving three-quarter time as the pastor of the congregation. The news was not received well by the congregation, and yet, the congregation followed the decision and made the necessary adjustments.

Another incident occurred with the next pastor. When the church was no longer able to afford to pay the pastor the required salary, he had decided to leave the church. The youth group, who had become attached to the pastor felt abandoned by his decision but no actions were taken to address this. Some of the members speak of this event as a reason for youth group's decline.

The next pastor appointed was sent to the church by the conference under a half-time appointment.²¹ Previously he served as district superintendent and took on the half-time appointment while working for the annual conference as the coordinator of stewardship. The congregation became disgruntled as they felt the message of the pastor

²¹ In United Methodist Church a pastor is sent to a church. Bishop and the cabinet, made up of district superintendents, make decision each year which pastor will be sent to what church. This process is called appointment. Most pastors ordained as an Elder are guaranteed full time appointment. However, there are some exceptions.

focused too much on financial stewardship of the church in his first year. After two years of being a pastor at Jesse Lee, he retired from ministry.

It is unclear what started the idea of seeking an ideal pastor for the future of their church, however, with help of the Rev. Engelhardt the congregation began a plan to help the cabinet send them the pastor they desired. While it can be interpreted as coincidence, the year that I have decided to take up a half-time appointment was the same year Jesse Lee church was seeking a new pastor.

In addition to the conflict involving pastors in their history there was evidence of conflict among members as I was told there were cliques that used to be confrontational with each other. Even in the first year of my pastorate in the church I witnessed a conflict between two families. Both families had daughters who were similar in age. In a short time they had become close friends and their daughters were in almost every activity. Soon the girls began to have some friction and they complained directly to their parents of these incidents in their own words. As the parents began to address the situation on their own the conflict did not go away. One of the families approached me with the situation: Then being wary of possible triangulation I began to suggest they speak to each other and then decided to set up mediation. While both parties agreed they would like to have a mediation to address the worsening situation, when we came close to setting up a date the family that had first approached me withdrew from the church as well as removing their daughter from the elementary school.

There is a common theme in the way the JLUMC people approach conflict. Chris Argyris, in his article “Teaching Smart People How to Learn,”²² theorizes that intelligent

²² Chris Argyris, “Teaching Smart People How to Learn,” *Reflections* 4, no. 2 (1991): 4-15 http://www.ncsu.edu/park_scholarships/pdf/chris_argyris_learning.pdf (accessed February 2, 2014).

people can have difficulty learning, if they have a narrow definition of learning, or, if they are defensive in their reasoning. Some highly intelligent people in JLUMC have difficulty in dealing with conflict in positive ways.

For example, in a conversation with one of the members of the church I was told a person in a wheelchair was not able to come to church as there was no handicap-accessible bathroom. There are three bathrooms in the building and the one closest to the sanctuary is too narrow for the person to use. Two other bathrooms which were labeled “men” and “women” had single bathroom stall with dividers that made it impossible for the wheel chairs to enter. Each bathroom has one sink and one toilet, yet, due to the dividers that were installed a very large bathroom was inaccessible to those who are in wheelchairs.

Then a new pastor who came to serve the church in July of 2011, and wondered why there were dividers for a bathroom with only one stall. As she inquired with some of the members of the church and explained to them how removing the dividers will make the bathroom more accessible for those with special needs, a decision was made to remove them. Once the dividers were removed they became not only handicapped-accessible but also family-friendly bathrooms for changing diapers. The person in the wheelchair never came back to the church.

Another example of this learning difficulty among the congregation is the way in which they have filled their committees. While the membership decreases and there are less available people to serve in committees, the nomination committee is expected to fill all the committees with members. As a result, many active members were asked to take up multiple positions in the church for many years.

For example, there are three committees in United Methodist Church structure that are required to be filled through annual meeting. They are Trustee, Committee on Lay Leadership (nomination), and Staff Parish Relationship. Each of these committees is made up of three people in three classes. While the Book of Discipline, the denominational polity, does not require that all the seats for each class be filled but have minimal and maximal limits for membership of the committee, JLUMC has tried to filled these committees to the max. Hence, members of these committees were always expected to serve in the committee indefinitely and no one was ever asked by the nomination to be on the committee; they were just expected to be on the committee.

In addition, some of these same people are asked to serve as a chair of other committees as well. The council chair of the church is the worship chair as well as a member of the trustee. She also sings in the choir. This practice has led to sense of resentment and burn-out.

While there have been many conversations regarding how to draw more people into the church, the few actual attempts to involve more people have not come to any fruition. In one attempt to simply attract visitors to the sanctuary, the church has put on periodic concerts from September 2011 to October of 2012. There were average of about 100 people coming to these concerts and the programs had a few national names that amazed many. However, no new people have returned to join the church since these concerts.

Chris Argyris identified six possible responses of people in conflict with an organization, which are outlined by Bolman and Deal's *Reframing Organizations*.²³

²³ Bolman and Deal, *Reframing Organizations*, 121-123.

These responses above have been seen at JLUMC as follows:

- Withdraw - When JLUMC received a pastor they were not happy with, some of the members left the church. When the pastor left, some of these people started to come back to the church.
- Withdraw psychologically and passively - Some have become withdrawn psychologically and passive. For example, they would not express their opinions or participate in committees. These people will attend the worship, but, refuse to serve or voice their opinion on church matters.
- Resist by restricting output - Then there are those who stop their contributions to the church. Once again, when the people became unhappy with their pastor, they started to delay or reduce their giving. This changed upon receiving a new pastor that they were happy with.
- Climb the hierarchy to a better job – This can be explained by the people who volunteer themselves for a committee that they deem powerful enough to make changes.
- Form alliances – There are groups of people who clump together when the church gather. These are often identified as “cliques”. They are often made up of people with similar opinions and desires for addressing a common conflict.
- Teaching their children to believe that work is not rewarding and hopes for advancement are slim - While many parents will plead innocent, including myself, when parents talk in front of the children regarding conflict in the church and share their disappointment, these conversations children’s attitude toward church. In addition, when the parents do not make it important part of their lives to attend worship this also becomes suggestions to children that church is not important. All of these are present in JLUMC in how they have responded to conflict. Whereas not all responses are negative responses, many of these responses do not allow for the conflict to become a source for any church to become a healthy congregation with a new future.

CHAPTER 3

PLAN OF IMPLEMENTATION

There are three goals to achieve in this project through engaging the Bible: (1) To bring an awareness to the people of JLUMC through defining a shared meaning of conflict and community; (2) To engage the people of JLUMC with the Bible and find methods to mediate shared meanings of conflict and community; and, (3) To bring practices of spirituality to sustain the culture of embracing conflict as a path to enhancing the health of the community and the prospect of a different future.

The first goal is to bring awareness to the people of Jesse Lee of conflict and its role in community. One of the responses that get in the way of conflict resolution is denial. Often people deny conflict and find an easy scapegoat as a way to avoid or remove conflict from a community. The first goal is to define “conflict” as JLUMC understands it. This goal is to be accomplished between the months of February and March of 2013.

The *first strategy* is to form a focus group that will develop common understanding of the terms “conflict” and “community.” The site team will help with assembling a diverse group of people in a focus group. One of the members of the site team will help with creating a hospitable and comfortable environment to help open up the people who are participating in the focus group. I will facilitate the focus group and introduce the purpose of the group and desired result. The focus group will be asked to help define the word “conflict” and come up with a shared meaning of the word. Another

site team member will be assigned to be a recording secretary to keep track of the ideas and thoughts, which will develop into unified understandings of “conflict” and “community.”

The *second strategy* is to begin to define and visualize a “healthy congregation” through seminars and workshops. Christine Pohl makes an observation in her article for *Christian Century*. Pohl writes:

Growing into the likeness of Christ and into the church as it is supposed to be cannot be separated from the messiness and disappointments that are part of human relationships. We can protect ourselves from such difficulties only by cutting ourselves off from our relationships, and that is rarely a satisfactory option.²⁴

Henceforth, the goal of the workshop will be to define a “healthy congregation” and how such a congregation can come to understand and address conflict. Peter Steinke argues that the “Healthy congregations focus on the healing resources, not the disease process. Congregations can promote greater health by focusing on past resources or by developing potential new ones.”²⁵ This workshop will bring an awareness of differences between “healthy congregations” and “unhealthy congregations”. After exploring the meaning of “healthy congregation” the participants will begin to learn to articulate how a “healthy congregation” will approach conflict.

The *third strategy* is to engage the Bible to show that conflict is a natural part of church life. In the book of Acts, chapter 10, the writer recounts the story of Peter and Cornelius. Here is a conflict of enduring difference as Jesus’ disciples following the Jewish custom of not associating with non-Jews. This is a great example of “single-loop”

²⁴ Christine Pohl, “Our Life Together: Four Practices of Healthy Congregations,” *Christian Century*, March 7, 2012, 22-25.

²⁵ Peter L. Steinke, “Promoting Healthy Congregations,” *Alban Weekly*, October 16, 2006, <http://www.alban.org/conversation.aspx?q=printme&id=2868> (accessed November 20, 2012).

thinking, which was coined by Chris Argyris. It refers to people who “define learning too narrowly as mere ‘problem solving’, so they focus on identifying and correcting errors in the external environment.”²⁶ While the disciples were given the Great Commission in the Gospel of Matthew to spread the good news, this commission was only applied to Jews. God has used Cornelius and the dream to show Peter, the leader of the church, that the Great Commission may apply to greater diversity of people than the disciples were thinking. Here I will also engage the Bible with the approach of multiple intelligence learning. For years churches have negated the different ways in which people learn. Through arts and other media, I will engage the focus group with the Book of Acts, chapter 10.

The second goal of the proposed project is to mediate meaning that was defined through the focus group addressing the first goal and begin to move the people of JLUMC to change the culture in order to embrace conflict in the community.

In an article in *Alban Weekly*, “Embracing Conflict,” Lawrence Peers suggests that we connect our response to conflict with our spiritual growth,²⁷ to view conflict as an opportunity for spiritual growth. I would add to Peers’ suggestion: in order for us to understand and see the potential for spiritual growth through conflict we can engage in spiritual practices to address and resolve conflict.

Through exploration of some of the Spiritual Disciplines introduced to us by Richard Foster, the participants will begin to reframe the attitude in which they each

²⁶ Chris Argyris, “Teaching Smart People How to Learn,” *Reflections* 4, no. 2 (1991): 4-15, http://www.ncsu.edu/park_scholarships/pdf/chris_argyris_learning.pdf (accessed February 2, 2014).

²⁷ Lawrence Peers, “Embracing Conflict” *Alban Weekly* 28 January 2013, no. 443.

approach conflict so that it becomes a spiritual growth experience. This goal will be addressed throughout the month of April.

The *first strategy* is to invite the people of JLUMC to a Bible Study on passages of the Bible that correspond to the definition of conflict derived in the focus group. In this Bible study the people of JLUMC will explore ‘Pretext’, ‘Text’, ‘Context’, ‘Subtext’, and ‘Appropriation.’²⁸

The “pretext” is the study of the world in which the biblical writers lived. This explores the historical, social and cultural setting that the writer experiences – the background – that informed the worldview of biblical writers.

Then the “text” that was selected for study is examined. This is to understand what the writer is trying to tell his audience. This is where the careful examination of the words being used is done.

Next is the “context” in which the text is used. This allows us to know why things are being said with what intentions and why.

Following the “context” is the “subtext,” which is the way in which the present reader can begin to make meaning of the text in relation to the current time and situation.

Once the connection is made between the “text” and the current reader, the meaning made becomes actions to be followed in “appropriation.”

For example, 1 and 2 Corinthians are the letters written by Paul to the church in Corinth. The pretext of the letters of Corinthians is that Corinth was the “newest” city among Greece cities. It was reestablished by Julius Caesar in 44 B.C. and was the capital of its providence. Most of its populace was freed Italian men and some Greek speaking

²⁸ Pretext, Context, Subtext, and Appropriation are terms utilized by Vincent L. Wimbush in *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures*.” The definitions are mine.

settlers who arrived by mid-first century A.D. There were numerous pagan temples with the dining rooms where the banquets were celebrated in honor of gods, meat markets that sold meat for sacrifice, the rows of small shops like the leatherworking shop, and meeting houses for community gatherings.²⁹

The text is the letters written by Paul to the church in Corinth to tell them that he is aware of the conflict in which they are in and advisement on how they are to deal with the conflict.

The context in which the letter was written is to address the problem in the church of Corinth that is dividing the community. The church was built while Paul was working in Corinth for eighteen months. According to chapter 5 verse 9 in the first letter to the Corinthians, Paul has sent a letter before these two letters, which is lost to us, contemporary readers, and this letter apparently caused more confusion than helped solve the problem in the church.

The “subtext” of these letters will be for the contemporary readers to begin to examine their own situation in which there might be a problem or problems that divides the community and how they are to respond.

Once the “subtext” leads the contemporary readers to recognize the conflict that divides them will they come up with action plans to address this as part of “appropriation.”

The *second strategy* is to introduce “the life of worship” to the people of JLUMC. Richard Foster tells us, “To worship is to experience Reality, to touch Life. It is to know,

²⁹ Pheme Perkins, *Reading the New Testament: An Introduction* (New York: Paulist Press, 1988), 116.

to feel, to experience the resurrected Christ in the midst of the gathered community. It is a breaking into the *Shekinah* of God, or better yet, being invaded by the *Shekinah* of God.”³⁰

Foster defines *Shekinah* as “the glory or the radiance of God dwelling in the midst of his people. It denotes the immediate presence of God as opposed to a God who is abstract or aloof.”³¹ Therefore each gathering of people of JLUMC, whether it is a business meeting or for fellowship, is to be understood as worship.

If JLUMC is to fulfill its vision statement of loving God with heart, soul, mind and strength, and practice loving one’s neighbor, then the people must make worship the priority in their lives.³² Therefore, as people gather they must strive to encounter each other with an awareness of being in the presence of God as part of changing their responses to conflict. As a way to do so, the leadership will be called to prayer before issues and matters of conflict before a group come to a decision. Or it may be that when conflicting situations occur the leader will ask the rest of the committee to take time to pray. During the prayer, people will invite the Holy Spirit to intervene and ask to guide the group in their decision-making. This will be a part of cultural change; in order to enhance this culture of prayer and worship, I will invite the congregation each week to read a scripture on prayer with an image for reflection. This invitation can be sent through email as well as the weekly bulletin.

The *third strategy* is to preach a sermon series using gathered information from the Bible study to share the information from the study with the rest of the congregation.

³⁰ Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: the Path to Spiritual Growth*. 20th anniversary ed. (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1998), 158.

³¹ Ibid.,158, footnote.

³² Ibid. 159-160.

This sermon series will also encourage the congregation to understand conflict as a part of spiritual growth.

The third goal is to sustain the spiritual growth of members through living worship everyday rather than worship once a week: in this way the people of JLUMC will embrace conflict in rhythm with the spiritual discipline of worship; both as part of their growth and daily life.

The *first strategy* is to introduce to the congregation *Lectio Divina* with the multiple intelligence method. While *Lectio Divina* is only focused on the reading and hearing of a text, I am going to introduce to the congregation *Lectio Divina* incorporated with images that are related to the Bible. Then the meditation can be expressed in multiple ways. For example, a person can draw, sing, move or even be in silence as a response to the words he or she reads and hears. Once again, through use of emails and weekly church bulletins the whole congregation will be asked to participate in the *Lectio Divina*.

The *second strategy* is to develop a support group modeled after the Methodist class. This group will be called a “covenant group.” Here the challenge is to develop a group that does not have a leader, but gather independently with accountability to one another. The group will meet once a week for three months. First the group will be introduced to the concept of covenant. Then they will be asked for confidentiality to encourage honesty in their conversations with each other. Second, part of the covenant will be to identify a conflict situation in their lives and in the church, and then talk about how it may be addressed through spiritual disciplines such as a prayer, study, fasting, worship, and giving. In addition, I will consult with Dr. Andrea Weinberger on ways to

incorporate “motivational interviewing” techniques into the covenant meetings.

Motivational Interviewing focuses on exploring and resolving ambivalence and centers on motivational processes within the individual that facilitate change.³³ The questions will be designed with the basic principles of “motivational interviewing,” which is “a collaborative, person-centered form of guiding to elicit and strengthen motivation for change.”³⁴

The *third strategy* is to schedule a workshop on conflict and spiritual growth.

With the help of my advisor, I will design a workshop that will invite the congregation and others to attend. The workshop will address how we can turn the conflict in our lives into paths toward experiencing God. This will be scheduled for June of 2013.

³³ W. R. Miller, & S. Rollnick, *Motivational Interviewing: Preparing People for Change*, 2nd ed. (New York: Guilford Press, 2002).

³⁴ Motivational Interviewing, <http://www.motivationalinterview.org/Documents/1%20A%20MI%20Definition%20Principles%20&%20Approach%20V4%20012911.pdf> (accessed February 2, 2014).

CHAPTER 4

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROJECT

When Assumption Meet the Actual Situation: Adjusting the Plan

The first goal in the plan of implementation was “to bring an awareness to the people of JLUMC through defining a shared meaning of the terms “conflict” and “community.” I had to modify this goal to focus on the term “community” first and show the connection of “conflict” as an inevitable part of being a community.

As I got closer to implementing the project I became suspicious of the clarity in meaning shared by the people in Jesse Lee UMC on the term, “community.” The longer I was in contact with Jesse Lee and heard stories of the people, I became aware that one of the major ways the people of Jesse Lee respond to conflict is by withdrawing. When there is withdrawal of members, there is no community in which to work on “conflict.” There will always be a conflict, but people will never acknowledge or learn to embrace conflict when there is avoidance.

Unless there was a desire for the people of Jesse Lee to be in a community and this desire was articulated in concrete purpose, there was no motivation for the people not to withdraw. While Bolman and Deal states, “A basic proposition of the political frame is that the combination of scarce resources and divergent interests produces conflict as surely as night follows day...Conflict is natural and inevitable...The focus of the political frame is not on resolution of conflict (as is often the case in both the structural and human

resource frames) but on strategy and tactics.”³⁵ Bolman and Deal theorize how a conflict may be approached for resolution but this thesis is based on the framework that those who are in conflict will stay together to resolve together.

The reality at Jesse Lee UMC is that conflict is understood to be a situation of escalated emotional discord between its members. In other words, people at Jesse Lee only acknowledge the presence of conflict when there are people in confrontation. This is supported in the history as when the first conflict occurred in 1813 as an increase of membership created a need for new place of worship. This divided the people into two factions and when one group won the decision of the location of the new church, the other faction left and built their own church.³⁶

As part of our genetic makeup, people will always want to be in a community, and in a community conflict is inevitable. In chapter four of her book, *Community That Is Christian*, Julie Gorman tells us that people are beginning to replace true relational community with “functional relationships.”³⁷ People want to be in a community, but they are also finding ways to avoid being in conflict. Unfortunately, when people keep withdrawing from conflict, there are no grounds for which to study the conflict as opportunities. Hence, there was a need to bring awareness of what is a “true community” in which we, as Christians, are called into being.

³⁵ Lee G. Bolman, and Terrence E. Deal, *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003), 197.

³⁶ Nelson T. Hall, “Recollection of Jesse Lee Methodist Episcopal Church in Easton, CT, <http://www.ctgenweb.org/county/cofairfield/pages/easton/jleechurch.html>, (accessed February 2, 2014).

³⁷ Julie Gorman, *Community That Is Christian: A Handbook on Small Groups* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1993), 99.

The timeline of the project had also changed. One of the challenges was to not have my project be in conflict with the goals and needs of the church. The congregation was so focused on its financial status that they were resistant to any project or program that may not have any connection to finding answers to their financial challenges. Due to the small size of the membership, finding participants for the project was difficult. My challenge was to find ways to relay to the congregation how the project may benefit the congregation as well as allow me to finish my program. This was even more difficult as the church council meetings often ended after 9 p.m. due to conversations regarding the finances. Often, I would find myself in front of the tired council members who were more eager to go back home than to listen to any project that did not seem directly connected to resolving their financial problems.

In addition, a person who had served as the treasurer of the church for over eleven years had made an announcement that he and his wife were moving to Florida. The treasurer was not only doing the treasurer's job but was functioning as the finance committee, church building manager, and many other tasks that were essential to the church. When he had sold his house and there was a definite date for their move, the anxiety level increased and there were many more conflicts raised in order to address this void that was to come. Some people commented that the church was going to close once he leaves. Some others commented that the conflict would disappear once he left as he became the decision maker of the church.

While the anxiety was rising regarding the move of the treasurer, the leadership was also concerned that the celebration for the treasurer and his wife might not be done

properly. There was planning for a huge celebration and honoring of the treasurer and his wife on the last Sunday of June.

These events and situation led to the congregational survey being administered in June rather than in April.

Tools Used:

The demonstration project is a project that requires “action research” methods for gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data. Action research is designed so that the research will change behavior of the group that is the subject of the research. This demonstration project aims to show how one congregation’s engagement with the Bible addresses issues of *conflict* through the practice of spiritual discipline to inform their *spiritual formation* in creating and nurturing its *community*.

There were six research tools used in the demonstration project. One instrument was a quantitative research tool (Congregational Survey) and five were qualitative tools (Focus groups, Interviews, Bible Studies, Sermons and Five Minute Devotionals).

US Congregational Survey

As a way to measure the change in the behavior of the congregation two surveys were administered before and after the project implementation.

I used the US Congregational Survey by the Presbyterian Church USA as a tool to measure the initial state of the congregation’s spirituality. The second survey was done at the end of the project and comparison between these two surveys was to reveal any difference in the state of spirituality in the congregation.

This survey profiles the following four areas³⁸:

- **Building Spiritual Connections:** Spiritual Connections are made through worshipers’ private devotions and their participation in congregational activities such as worship. Congregations focus on Spiritual Connections

³⁸ <http://www.uscongregations.org/majorstrengths.htm>.

by cultivating faith and responding to the spiritual needs of their worshipers.

- **Building Inside Connections:** Inside Connections focus on the ways worshipers connect with others in the congregation through group activities, serving in leadership roles, and financial support.
- **Building Outside Connections:** Outside Connections include the ways that the congregation and its worshipers connect with the community and with non-members, including service to the community, caring for neighbors, inviting other to attend, and welcoming newcomers.
- **Building Identity Connections:** Identity Connections deal with who worshipers are do they look like other Americans? It also deals with congregational identity and worshipers' vision for the future.

The survey will be used to measure the state of spiritual formation at the beginning of the project and the end of the project. It will also be used for social analysis of the congregation on the attitude and connection the members have with the church.

The survey, unintentionally, also revealed some level of conflict among Jesse Lee members as conducting the survey brought to light other tensions in the congregation. This will be discussed later in chapter five as I discuss in detail of the social and historical analysis of Jesse Lee in context of “community” and “conflict.”

The second survey was administered on January 12th, 2014. Due to the Advent season and the leadership still in transition with the finance committee, the second survey had to wait until after the New Year. While the survey was originally scheduled for January 5th, 2014 the winter weather led to low attendance and the survey was postponed. However, the postponed date did help with getting more participation. For the second survey there were 42 participants. As the people were filling out surveys I have noticed that some of the elderly members in the congregation were having little difficulty filling

out the survey. This may explain why the questions were left blank. I have printed the survey in large letters in hope to make it easy for the participants to read the survey.

However, there were many questions that were unanswered.

Focus Groups

Norman K. Denzin and Yvonne S. Lincoln³⁹ defined the function of the focus group as, “a way to answer *how* and *why* questions that remained unanswered by positive quantitative methods. The primary goal and inquiry from this perspective is to generate rich, complex, nuanced, and even contradictory accounts of how people ascribe meaning to and interpret their lived experience with an eye toward how these accounts might be used to affect social policy and social change.” By utilizing focus groups a researcher can obtain information that she is not able to quantify.

One of the objectives in using focus group research was to explore how people make meaning. Specifically, the project research examined individual and shared meanings of “conflict” and “community” among members of Jesse Lee UMC.

I had scheduled three focus groups to reach this objective, but only two groups met because the third group could not get enough participants. There were 18 participants in two focus groups and the age of participants range from 15 to 82 years old.

The first focus group was set to meet on August 21, 2013 at 10am to 12 noon at Jesse Lee UMC’s fellowship hall. I had asked my colleague Rev. Wanda Brown for assistance in leading this group. There were seven (7) people participating in the first group and the age ranged from 49 to 82 years old. There were two males and five females

³⁹ Norman K. Denzin, and Yvonna S. Lincoln, *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2011), 546.

and they have attended Jesse Lee between eight (8) to fifty-three (53) years. All the participants felt they belonged to Methodism.

The second focus group met on August 22, 2013 and this group met at night in order to get participation from those who were working. There were eleven (11) people participating and the age of the group ranged from fifteen (15) years old to sixty-two (62) years of age; and seven (7) males and four (4) females.

Third Focus Group

In order to address the informational need of the congregation, two sessions were scheduled to review the US Congregations survey results. The congregation was invited to meet after Sunday worship to learn of the findings from the survey. There were about twenty (20) people present at the meeting. This also became an opportunity for implementation of Bible Engagement where the participants were asked to make meaning of the words being used and understand the strength of the church through the biblical examples. The meeting incorporated scriptures that reflect the subject in review. For example, the introduction to the survey started with scriptures from Isaiah 43:16-19, which recalls the story of exodus of how the Israelites were being pursued by the Egyptians and God splits the sea to let them pass through. This passage was a reminder that the survey process was a way to see the path God will open for the people when they find themselves trap. The process provided an opportunity for connecting the biblical narratives with contemporary situation in efforts to engage the meaning making process when engaging with the Bible.

Interview

Interview is an empirical tool of qualitative research. “Interviews consist of accounts given to the researcher about the issue in which he or she is interested.”⁴⁰ I have used this method as a way to study the people who have taken part in the project.

I have selected one participant from the Bible study and one participant from the Five Minute Daily Devotion to gather data on their experiences of each program. In addition, these two people had participated in the other aspects of the program such as the congregational survey, the focus group and sermons.

The interview questions ask their experience of the project and feedback of the program they had participated. The interviewees were videotaped and both were given the same set of questions. One interviewee is a member of my site team who had full awareness of the project from the very beginning. She also had an interesting insight on conflict that supports my understanding of the conflict, which will discuss in detail in chapter 5 under the subtitle of “conflict.” The second interviewee is one of the leaders of the church who participated in the private devotional for forty-two (42) days. Both interviewees are regular attendees of the worship services and I felt had most exposure to the project.

Bible Studies

Bible study is the one of the tools used to engage people with the Bible to make meaning and mediate meaning of the terms “community”, “conflict”, “spiritual discipline” and “spiritual formation.” Traditional or common understandings of Bible study among the masses are a study of the Bible where the leader tells the group how to

⁴⁰ Denzin, *The Sage Handbook*, 529.

understand the scriptures they are reading for the day. In topical⁴¹ Bible studies the Bible frequently supports the theological views of the leader. This often makes the study of the Bible dogmatic and irrelevant to the participants who do not share the same theological view. Often such study is good at convincing the participant to follow certain propaganda or agenda of the group but it does not allow the participants to be influenced by the Bible. I had designed a Bible study where the participants are asked to read the selected passage from the Book of Romans and reflect on the meaning and any personal implication that may transcend into Jesse Lee UMC. Originally I had picked 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians, but after reading the article, “The People of God in Community” in the *Life with God Bible* I have decided to use the Book of Romans. Among the books written by Paul on subject of “community” it is known to have the most impact on the people who studied it. It describes two types of life, *bios* (the physical) and *zoë* (the spiritual) and the human struggle between these two. In addition, one of the major themes in Romans by Paul is insistence on being a community together. As I explored spiritual formation in Jesse Lee I felt the Book of Romans was a good place to start to help the people understand the difference between the physical lives they live versus the spiritual lives they are called to live, and the importance of spiritual formation in living the spiritual life.

The Bible study was able only to get 4 participants. There were many reasons but one of the reasons for no participation is the sense of no extra time in the schedule of the

⁴¹ The topical Bible study is a study of certain topics in relation to Bible. Often the Bible is used to support a certain political stand by taking scriptures out of its context in which it is written. For example, when I was still a lay person and doing the study on the women of the Bible the study did not include Deborah. It is not popularly known that Deborah was a judge who led the Israelites in victory over the fight against the Canaanites. This story can be found in Judges 4-5. By not mentioning Deborah as one of the women in the Bible, the churches were able to persuade people that women are not fit to be spiritual leaders of the church.

people to attend the one hour study. After the second week I have quickly decided to make the program more portable and offered 5-minute daily devotionals. The devotions for each day were based on readings from the book of Romans. The themes related to community and conflict. It also reflected on the Bible study on the Book of Romans. I picked out a scripture for a day and attached the scripture with a picture that best illustrated the message of the scripture. In addition, there was some commentary from the *Life with God Bible* or my own reflection with best fitted quotes. I had more participation in this as I got nine (9) people to participate in the program. Devotional materials were delivered through emails each day to allow the people to take five (5) minutes to meditate and pray. Among the nine (9) participants two (2) people were not attending Jesse Lee, but wanted to participate. One of these people is a sister of a Jesse Lee member. The member of Jesse Lee was going away and did not have access to her own email for a week. She had asked me to forward the devotional to her sister's email. When her sister read the devotional she had also asked that she be included in the devotional. However, it was hard to measure the effect of the Bible study and devotional readings and meditations, as there was no real method of receiving feedback from those who were participating. Yet, there were some voluntary feedback as the people who took part in the devotions told me how much they enjoyed the process. Also, the interview with one of the participants gave some impact of this spiritual discipline on the lives of participants.

The Bible study⁴² and the devotionals⁴³ were designed to last for six (6) weeks but I was only able to implement five weeks when my mother-in-law passed away at the

⁴² See Appendix F.

⁴³ See Appendix G.

fifth week of the project and I had to take a break. Unfortunately, this break made it hard to continue the project, as I was unable to reconvene the participants.

Sermons

One of the most effective ways in which meaning is made and mediated in the congregation of Jesse Lee was through sermons. This is also a tool in which was used to engage people to the Bible to understand the terms, “community”, “conflict”, “spiritual disciplines”, and “spiritual formation.”

In addition, the sermon will be used in bringing awareness of the terms “healthy” and “unhealthy” congregation. These terms are familiar terms used in relation to the health of a person. However, it is an unfamiliar term in relation to the church. In addition, a picture of a healthy church drawn by the congregation may be different from the biblical understanding of the healthy church. This was addressed in the sermon that was preached on August of 18, 2013. This was to bring awareness to the congregation as I invited them to join the focus group that was designed to discuss the definition of “community”, “conflict”, “healthy” and “unhealthy” church.

The worship is one of the spiritual disciplines.⁴⁴ In the life of Jesse Lee UMC, worship is the most common way for the majority of its members to participate in the spiritual disciplines. Therefore, each Sunday worship was designed to focus on using these spiritual disciplines as a way to form spiritual formation of the congregation.

Even before the project began there was a sense of denial of conflict within the congregation. Whenever there were conflicts they were attributed to a person or incident rather than the way in which the people interact with the situation. One of the

⁴⁴ Foster, 158.

interviewees expressed that he does not see the difference in his definition of conflict. He had also shared with me in the beginning of my project that he does not define conflict as a difference between people but a situation where there is no room for negotiation or resolution. Hence, the way in which the majority of the congregation experiences conflict is when an incident becomes a highly volatile situation where there is no communication or possibility for resolution.

As I began my research into conflict, I had introduced the idea of conflict as an opportunity for the congregation. This was done at beginning of January 2013 as I had foreseen the possible conflict due to the major change in the congregation through the moving of the church treasurer.

The sermons have become a means for the congregation to think and reflect on situations of their lives. In the period of the implementation of the project I had also incorporated the visuals such as the movie clips, video clips, and pictures as a way to communicate the message.

Five Minute Devotional

The 5-minute devotional was used as a visual methodology to explore the impact of the Bible engagement in the lives of the participants. Once again, I had kept in mind the idea of multiple intelligence as key to inviting the participants to engage the Bible. Each devotional started with one of the spiritual disciplines as a theme followed by a scripture and comments on the scripture. Then a photo that expressed the message followed the scripture. In addition, a famous quote on the subject of the spiritual disciplines is included for a reflection.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ See Appendix G.

CHAPTER 5

CONFLICT AND COMMUNITY AT JESSE LEE UMC: A SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

Sources of Jesse Lee UMC's conflict is embedded in the scarcity of resources and enduring differences as they struggle with the financial crisis of struggling to pay the bills each month while they have a building that is over 200 years old. However, the conflict they have is the way in which they communicate with each other as they face these triggers of conflict.

Historically, people of Jesse Lee dealt with conflict through six responses: (1) withdraw (physically), (2) withdraw psychologically and passively, (3) resist by restricting giving to the church, (4) volunteer him or herself into a position of power, (5) form alliance with other members, (6) and not showing the children relevance of the church life by not regularly participating in church activities and not speaking positively of the church.

Among these six there is evidence that the congregation favors the response of physical or mental withdrawal in the hope of avoiding the conflict. Unfortunately, these responses often led the community into false sense of the presence of conflict. This can lead to denial that there is conflict. According to the data shown in Appendix B the presence of conflict was present since 2007 when the congregation was receiving an added subsidy of \$5000 from the trustee. This reflects the scarcity that began to impact the community and the conflict in the community was not acknowledged until 2009 when the Jesse Lee Preschool, owned by Jesse Lee UMC, was in litigation with the school

director. The data in Appendix B shows that there was already a deficit experienced by the church in 2004, which was recovered in 2005. However, the church went back to deficit again on 2006 and continued to be so for next four years. The question was asked, “Over the last two years, has there been any conflict in this congregation?” In answer to the first congregational survey,⁴⁶ 36% of the congregation was not aware of the conflict in the congregation and 55% thought there was some minor conflict. In the second congregational survey⁴⁷ 23% indicated that they were not aware of the conflict and 47% thought there was some minor conflict. The response of “don’t know” changed from 5% in the first survey to 16% on the second survey. This indicates that many congregation members are unaware that the congregation is in conflict or see the current conflict as insignificant. Furthermore, in the first survey 5% responded that there is a major conflict, with leaders or people leaving. This indicates that there are a selected few who understand the intensity of the conflict, which are most likely the leaders of the church who are aware of the financial state of the church as well as the personal stories in the congregation that is not publicly announced. This response only had 2% in the second survey.

Goal

The goal of this part of the project is to bring awareness to the people of Jesse Lee UMC of the meaning of “community” and “conflict”. As a step toward bringing awareness of different images of “community” the concept of “healthy” and “unhealthy” congregation was first introduced. One of the awareness pieces is to stay away from the

⁴⁶ See Appendix E, “US Congregational Survey, Question and Answers,” Question 52.

⁴⁷ See Appendix F, “Congregational Survey Question and Answers,” Question 53.

language of “dying” church. The word “dying” was used by few members of the congregation in the beginning of the project. The word “dying” was first mentioned when the church council gathered to discuss the possibility of bell power project. While the word was used to refer to look of the exterior of the building and bell tower that was falling piece by piece, there was an underlying understanding that the building will reflect the internal condition of the congregation. Fixing of the bell tower is to announce to the outside community that Jesse Lee UMC was not dying. Then the word was used again when the people were anxious about the treasurer leaving the church. As the time approached and the people did not feel, including the treasurer, they were ready to replace the treasurer people spoke of Jesse Lee UMC “dying.”

Definitions of Key Terms: Community & Conflict Community

By definition the word “community” is “a group of people who live in the same area (such as a city, town, or neighborhood), a group of people who have the same interests, religion, race, or so forth, or a group of nations.”⁴⁸ While the community called Jesse Lee is created under the interest of religion, what truly makes it a community is more than its common interest.

Two major resources in defining “community of God” came from the *Community that is Christian* by Julie A. Gorman and *the Life with God Bible* by Richard Foster. Julie Gorman tells us, “If we are ever to think and act Christianly we must take into account the heritage that is a part of our uniqueness as children of God. That heritage is

⁴⁸ *Online Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, s.v. “community,” <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/community> (accessed February 2, 2014).

community oriented more than individually focused. It is *cooperative* rather than *competitive*.”⁴⁹

An example of this can be found in the Trinity where the three persons of God, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are in communal relationship of working together. Their work is so united that we see a singular expression of God at work in the lives of God’s people. “In God’s own life there is an activity of mutual self-giving, a community of sharing, a ‘society of love’ (Augustine) that is the basis of God’s history of love for the world narrated in Scripture.”⁵⁰ This activity by the Trinity is an example of how we are to become a community. In the community of Trinity there is recognition of each individual person with respect for each other. There is no hierarchy among these three persons; they are all equal in decision-making. No one’s ego, to use a human, psychological analogy, gets in the way of accomplishing the goal among these three persons. They are *cooperative* and not *competitive*. This is how we are called to be a community.

Gorman tells us a community is true only when it is formed under time and commitment. She observes that the “true community” is more than just gathering under a shared interest.⁵¹ The time that Gorman speaks of is a time to build an understanding of trust of one another. While people could gather together many times for many years, one cannot automatically assume that time alone will build community. For example, when I was in college I was in a pre-med program. This meant that I would be in classes with the

⁴⁹ Gorman, *Community That Is Christian*, 11.

⁵⁰ Daniel L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 61.

⁵¹ Gorman, 18.

same people for four years. Despite the fact that I spent hours in class learning with the same people, the people in the program did not become a community. I found community only with those whom I spent time building trust. The trust was built when I began to know the people and they began to know me.

Despite the fact that Jesse Lee UMC is a small congregation with an average attendance of only 60 people, there are people who attend worship almost every Sunday yet, they do not know the community and the community is unaware of their story and heart's desires. There are people who know each other by name and face but do not know each other's life stories. Here is an example, GL is a member of the church for over 40 years and was very active in the church. He is a member of the choir and served in many committees until his health got in the way. MR had been a member of Jesse Lee for over fifteen (15) years and currently he is one of the very active members. MR decided to do some landscape for the church in order for it to look pretty for Easter. GL volunteered to help MR. On the day they worked together MR learned for the first time that GL was a landscape architect who traveled all over the country to design gardens and landscapes. MR was surprised by this fact as they had known each other for more ten years. The story becomes more poignant as I recall that MR is one of the key leaders in the church and GL was one of the past key leaders of Jesse Lee. It is an example of the disconnect within Jesse Lee UMC as a community.

We live in a time where trust is hard to come by and taking time to build trust is of little interest. There are other factors that contribute to the lack of community as well. First, we live in a transient society where people no longer live in one place for long periods of time. Small towns like Easton used to be able to trust in that the people who

were born in the town would continue to be there forever. But globalization has changed this. More companies require their employees to travel around the world and move to different places. Frequent relocation inhibits people from building strong connections.

Then there are many stories of how trust had been betrayed. Divorce is becoming a normative pattern for the family. Companies have let go of employees who were loyal for many years in order to increase company profits. People no longer expect to work for one company until retirement. Recent revelations of clergy abuses shake peoples' trust even in God. In such environments, it is hard for people to build trusting relationships. More people are living with experience of betrayal. We don't expect relationships to last. This leads many people to shy away from building deep relationships, relationships in which we can become open and vulnerable. Then there are those who don't have respect for others who have made any connection. There is even a place where people can hire someone to break up with someone. There was a time when only acceptable way of breaking up a relationship with someone was to speak to him or her directly. Now, we live in a society where people break up the relationship through voicemail message, email, text message, or by hiring someone else to do it for them. Relationships are becoming more about matters of convenience rather than deep, meaningful ways to connect with other human beings. Yet, the core foundation of a community is the relationship between the people who gather together.

Jesse Lee UMC is a community that reflects this societal trend with their own history of being betrayed. First, Jesse Lee UMC is located in the town of Easton, CT where many of the town residents are part of the globalized workplace. Many people are employed by companies that have offices all over the world and many of the employees

are sent to different places depending on the needs of the company. For example, one of the members of Jesse Lee works for one of the companies in New York City. One day the person made an announcement that he will be sent to Scotland for six months to work on a project for the company the next morning. While he is leaving his wife and four children for six months to live in Scotland they were glad that it was not a permanent transfer. However, the people in Easton understand that many of its members move out of the community due to work or other personal situations. This pattern of migration also impacts the ministry of the church. It is difficult to build a community when the people who come to church may not be with them after six months or a year. It is rare that this church receives a member who will stay for a long time. Hence, the challenge of Jesse Lee is to learn and practice building genuine relationships in limited fragments of time; relationships that allow people to trust and provide seeds for community.

Another obstacle at Jesse Lee UMC has been the constant turnover in pastoral leadership. For over ten years Jesse Lee Church has had a different pastor every two-to-three years. The frequency of turnover in pastoral leadership makes it necessary for some members to take up the role of vision-bearer. Unless there are members of the church who can be the vision-bearers, there is no way to keep the continuity of its history and tradition in relation to the future of the church. Fortunately, Jesse Lee Church had a lay leader who is the church historian and spiritual leader who kept the people together. His leadership is still much appreciated by the members of the church.

In addition, they have a choir director who has been with the church for over 40 years. Among 50-60 people attending each Sunday 10 to 15 people are the members of the choir. This group represents the core members of the church.

Unfortunately, these bonds that sustain Jesse Lee are also part of what hinders Jesse Lee from growing. The Jesse Lee UMC that I had encountered in July of 2011 was a group of people who were bonded by the friendships that were built over many years. These people were meeting outside of the Sunday worship service, which met the need to gather more than once. Without intentionally creating activities that were geared toward inviting new people into the Jesse Lee UMC fellowship, there was no venue in which new people could connect with the congregation except on Sunday worship.

Community needs time, trust, and strong, healthy relationships. Another quality needed for a community to be a “True Community” is commitment. Gorman defines this as a community “shaped by reality and sacrifice...[T]rue community is not the place of bliss and harmony that some would envision as the ideal. The bubble bursts for the one who believes that true Christianity is the absence of conflict and difference.”⁵²

This commitment described by Gorman has sustained Jesse Lee through some of their most difficult times. Since 2002, Jesse Lee had several incidents that caused conflict in the church. One conflict involves the director of Jesse Lee Preschool; this incident went to litigation and resulted in the church paying lots of money to the director. Then there were several incidents with pastors. Jesse Lee could not find a pastor they were satisfied with and it led many people to withdraw from the congregation. In addition, many of the major supporters of the church began to leave the church due to a death or retirement. Through all these challenges, there were people who were committed enough to stay and work through the challenges. However, these people also became the strong voices that made others who were new to the church feel left out.

⁵² Gorman, 99.

For example, when the church council began to look at how they might invite new people to the church, some felt the need to address the church website. Being in an advanced technology age, the leadership recognized that people search for churches through websites. When the council began to seek people to help with this project a member of the church confessed that this was an idea that was presented to the council close to ten years ago that was shot down by the few strong voices. The people who brought up the idea felt they were ignored and kept away from getting involved.

Gorman also tells us that in order “for community to exist there must be a ‘setting aside’ of individualism that centers only on itself and its advancement.”⁵³ The commitment that is required is not only the commitment to stay together but it is also a willingness to set aside one’s own interest.

Yet, the motivation for people to gather around an interest is often self-gratifying. Even the charitable works done by the people in the church can be done with the purpose of self-gratification: “We want those whom we help to be grateful to us.” For example, as part of the confirmation class project the confirmation class participated in what we call, Midnight Run. It is a project to feed the homeless where the volunteers will pack up a van full of food and clothes and drive to three different street corners in New York City to give food and clothing. The confirmation class came back somewhat disappointed and discouraged by the experience. As they reflected aloud it became know that at one of the stops they made, the people they gave food and clothes to were somewhat ungrateful and many of the homeless complained. There was some expression of entitlement to the things they had received. The experience was not as rewarding as they had hope and there

⁵³ Ibid., 100.

was no excitement about the experience. The work done by the members and the gifts they contributed, failed to bring the kind of results participants expected. Jesse Lee members controlled the input—they gave food and clothes—but they could not control the responses of recipients. The fact that their work had helped many people to have warm clothes and food to eat was not satisfying enough.⁵⁴

John Wesley and his Holy Club members exercised discipleship through methodical ways, which included helping the poor.⁵⁵ They had taught the poor to learn to read and write as well as other helpful ways to improve their lives. He had also visited the people in jail and helped the families of the prisoners. These are works done in order to practice discipleship. The discipleship practiced by Holy Club members is a way in which one continues to strengthen a relationship with God.

The self-interest is to become people of God. Eugene Peterson in “The People of God in Community” tells us that the “gathered communities” of New Testament are “the Body of Christ in the world – liberally become a new substance, a new organism, in which people become part of one another and, through the power of the Holy Spirit, help one another begin, nurture, and sustain their relationship with God.”⁵⁶ The Jesse Lee UMC was a community that was once was a new organism but no longer knows how to nurture and sustain its body.

⁵⁴ Gorman defines three barriers to becoming a “true community.” One of the barriers is to give up feeling of superiority where intention is motivated by a need to eliminate “your pain so I feel better.” See *Community That Is Christian: A Handbook on Small Groups*, 100-101.

⁵⁵ <http://wesley.nnu.edu/john-wesley/john-wesley-the-methodist/chapter-v-the-holy-club/>.

⁵⁶ Eugene Peterson, *God's Message for Each Day: Wisdom from the Word of God* (Nashville, TN: J. Countryman, 2004), 254.

Conflict

In a community conflict is inevitable.⁵⁷ Gary T. Furlong tells us, “we are all faced with conflict situations in many aspects of our lives, whether in our personal life, in the workplace, or with just about anyone we meet.”⁵⁸ In his book, Furlong describes 8 different models of conflict and one of the models is called the Circle of Conflict.⁵⁹ In this model Furlong describes five underlying causes or drivers of the conflict situation, and they are: values, relationships, externals/moods, structure, and data.

Conflict is a difference or differences between two or more members of a community where a barrier or barriers in communication hinder members from meeting their needs. He also outlines different models of conflict.⁶⁰ Bolman and Deal state “Conflict is natural and inevitable” when there are a lack of resources and power.⁶¹ Gorman states “Honesty will inevitably lead to conflict.”⁶²

As long as a community is a living and active organization there will be a conflict. There is a story of a child who saw his mom cutting each end of a roast beef before cooking it in a pot. This was the tradition that the family kept until the child asked, “Why do you cut the ends of the roast beef?” The answer to this question was, “We have always done it this way.” So the child decided to investigate and finally found someone who knew the real answer and was told this, “The family had a pot that was not big enough to

⁵⁷ Here I am borrowing words from Dr. Joseph Crockett, my advisor who came up with this phrase while working on this project.

⁵⁸ Gary T Furlong, *The Conflict Resolution Toolbox: Models & Maps for Analyzing, Diagnosing, and Resolving Conflict* (Mississauga, ON: J. Wiley & Sons Canada, 2005), 1.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 21.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 20.

⁶¹ Bolman, *Reframing Organizations*, 197.

⁶² Gorman, 99.

fit the meat, so the great grandmother would just cut the ends of the roast beef so it could fit into a pot.” The child who asked the question about this practice was a conflict. It raised a disturbance to the practice that was not questioned. The difference in each of us lead to the question of “why?” and depending on the response to this question the difference can be a simple question to be explored or it can become a seed for conflict.

It is possible that a community can be in denial, but, it is unlikely to have a community without conflict. A community is made of people and people are complicated. The life of the community is more than the interaction between the people who gather. The community is the people. Those who gather define the identity and character of the community. Each person in the community has his or her own issues that they bring to the community. These issues sometimes translate into transference, where a person brings his or her experience into the situation and draws conclusions away from what is actually happening. The model that closely relates this conflict is the circle of conflict model. In this model Furlong identifies relationships as one of the drives in conflict. The relationship is a stereotype that is based on an incident that may be supported by the past experience of person or group. An example given by Furlong is of a customer who had a problem with a bank over her bank account, and later finds charges on her Visa bill that she doesn’t remember making. Automatically the customer blames the bank for the mistake on her Visa bill. In psychology this is called transference.⁶³

⁶³ According to Samuel E. Wood, Ellen R. Green Wood, and Denise Roberts Boyd, *Mastering the World of Psychology* (Boston: Pearson/Allyn and Bacon, 2004), 368, transference is an intense emotional reaction by a patient during psychoanalysis involving the display of feelings and attitudes toward the analyst that were present in a significant past relationship of the patient. The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines it, “psychology: a process by which the feelings that you had for someone (such as a parent) when you were a child become directed to someone else (such as a psychoanalyst)” <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/transference>.

In one of the churches I pastored I had a member who became very excited about having me as her pastor. It turned out that I had very similar approach to relating to people as her favorite pastor in the past. She has told me I have reminded her so much of this pastor whose name was Joseph and she decided to call me Josephine to show how similar I was to him. However, I personally did not feel this connection as the man was a white male who was in his 70's who lived in Connecticut for many years and I am an Asian woman in her thirties, who was born and raised in Korea until ten-years-old and moved and lived in New York City most of her life.

However, this woman saw what she thought was resemblance of the man and thought I was him. When she realized that I was different from him she became distant. Gorman tells us, "Transference threatens mutuality-hearing and understanding another. All of us have a history of relationships. Present interactions remind us of past reactions and patterns."⁶⁴ Somehow people perceive the other people according to their own experience and decide who the person will be depending on their past experience or current needs. When this presumption is not met, then the person will interpret the situation into a conflict.

In the interview, CL shared how she has learned through the project that she had presented conflict between herself and I because she was feeling conflicted. As I was trying to resolve the conflict about my project and timeline that I needed to keep but was not, she had found herself conflicted as she was trying to resolve her own life situation. Hence, conflict is not singular. One of the most overlooked aspects of conflict is that the people who come together at the table of a conflict do not always bring the conflict at

⁶⁴ Gorman, 105.

hand. They often have other conflicts that they carry into the conversations and the process.

Another aspect of a conflict in community is that a community that has a long history brings a conflict from the past. Many practices within the church are often unquestioned. There are many, “That is the way it has always been done.” Often when the people have been gathered together for a long time many practices and ideas are simply accepted. When those practices or ideas are challenged it becomes a conflict. This conflict does not have to be bad. It can actually be a way to help the community to be relevant to its time; a mechanism for regeneration for a renewed community.

Part of the challenge in conflict in a community is that the community is made up of people whose lives have primarily focused on themselves and their interests. When we start from the self as a way to understand a situation, it is difficult to see things from other perspectives. True community that is Christian—a community of God--requires the people to see things from God’s point of view.

There is difference between a “community in God” and a “community of God.” A “community in God” is an assembly of people who are gathered in the name of God. A “community of God” is a people who gather to become part of God. A person who desires to be in the “community in God” simply does so by being with the people who are interested in learning about God. However, learning does not make the person become part of the topic in study. We can study art but the study does not make us artists. Only those who practice art become artists. As such, people who study or learn about God in knowledge do not become people of God. Only those who are willing to carry their knowledge into practice can become “of God.” However, in order to understand what it

means to be “of God” there is need to understand God. This is where the Bible becomes an essential part of a community in becoming “of God.”

Jesse Lee UMC’s goal is to be a “community of God.” We know this by their vision statement, which states “Jesse Lee seeks to be a compassionate congregation whose members, through word and deed, live the Great Commission of Jesus Christ to ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself.’”

The question is, “Is Jesse Lee UMC living a life that reflections the vision statement?” The place to go to measure and evaluate how the JLUMC is doing is the Bible. In the Bible, especially Paul’s writings in the New Testament provide many examples of how a community struggles to become the “community of God.” The early churches described in the letters written by Paul show how ethnic differences between two peoples, Jews and Gentiles, were a source of conflict among early Christians as they came to figure out how to work through their differences to be a community.

Things that may help change a conflict into an opportunity

Gorman lays out three barriers to be a “True Community”: ⁶⁵

1. Preconceived expectations of the people that were created out of fear of the unknown.
2. Predetermined expectations based on limited beliefs and distorted experiences, i.e. labeling or prejudice.
3. Inability to give up rigidities that make the community think that “*we* alone know the right way, have the correct solution, or have experienced the truth.”

⁶⁵ Gorman, 100-101.

These barriers are quite common among the churches that have a long history. The history supports the church in keeping the old patterns and activities in place.

An example of how these three barriers work in Jesse Lee was witnessed when the Jesse Lee UMC leadership solicited help from the congregation for new ideas on fundraising and one of the members came up with an online auction. There were many fundraising activities that happened at the church that were no longer useful. These activities were more familiar and already proven to work. Yet, they were no longer fit the present time for the reason that they could not make the profit when the work involved was a strain on the small membered church and there were no volunteers to organize and run the fundraiser.

An online auction was to replace traditional church tag sales, which required lots of manual labor before and after the event. The idea is to reach outside of the church for money. The congregation recognized that the finances within the church are insufficient to sustain the church. The online auction would allow the finance source to come from others, an online community, which could potentially be global. However, the fear of the unknown led many people to hesitate, as there was a need for a \$600 commitment to set up the auction. This event proved to the congregation that the conflict can be an opportunity. Although there were some skeptics and hesitation about the success of the project, it brought in over \$3,000 to the church budget. In addition, it brought in members who were on the spectator side and came to worship but did not get involved.

There was a rigid understanding of how to build a community. While some people felt the online auction would not build community it served to help connect some of the members of Jesse Lee closer to the core of the community. The group was formed

voluntarily and was made up of the people who were not serving in the council. These were the people who normally stand on the sideline and observe. It also allowed the church to reach out to the community for support and be recognized.

Conflict occurs when a difference between two or more people become unresolved and it begins to cause friction. God has created each person as unique individuals, which means that we all are different from each other. When these differences come together it will create disagreement. When the disagreement is not resolved it will rise to a level of intense dispute.

However, when a community has been together for a long time, like the family who never questioned the ritual of cutting the ends of roast beef, there is general acceptance of the things that seem to be working. In such a community there may be a denial that conflict exists. When a voice questions the practices or disagrees with the majority, the first response is to ignore it. However, when the minority challenges the majority the community begins to recognize conflict. Jesse Lee UMC was in a phase of denial with regard to some internal conflicts as the minority who may interject new ideas and questions the old practices would leave or withdraw from the group when the majority ignores and denies to entertain the ideas or questions. This left the majority puzzled as to why the people will not volunteer and continue to be part of the community.

In addition, the leadership did not know how to address the conflict that was present in the community. One approach is to not share the information with the rest of the congregation. For example, the congregation received a pastoral leader as a half-time ministry in July 2008. During the two years of the first half-time pastor, he commuted from another town, which highlighted the fact that he was half-time. The congregation

was unhappy with the pastor, the financial difficulties and the decrease of membership. All of these issues were assumed to be associated with the pastor. The congregation requested a half-time pastor who would live in the parsonage. Despite the fact that they had a half-time pastor for two years before the second half-time pastor they were still hesitant to share with the public that their pastor was half-time.

Bring awareness to Jesse Lee

Due to the events in the church, I felt that the congregation was not ready to hear about my project. There were feeling of anxiety and urgencies as they faced a huge transition of losing a member who had his finger on every aspect of the church. He was given the official title of treasurer, but he was more than a treasurer. He was the decision maker and who knew everything about the church besides the lay leader. By 2011, he knew more history and church matters than anyone else. He was the go-to person at the church for information. I felt that there was no room for introjection of a project for the pastor's doctor of ministry. Yet, I saw an opportunity for me to bring awareness to the congregation on the topic of "community", "conflict" and "spiritual discipline." First, beyond the crisis of losing the "go-to" person in the church there was a large project of restoration of the sanctuary. The foundation had deteriorated to a point where it has become issue of safety. Parts of the flooring of the sanctuary were sinking and began to give with the possibility of people falling through if it was not addressed. By this time the church already had a Restoration of Bell Tower committee and they were successful in gaining the funds and people to work on the restoration. The project was to be done before the summer and this committee had decided to continue to be the Restoration Committee for the church foundation.

In order to bring awareness to the congregation about the project a few steps were set for implementation. Part of that step was to invite the congregation to 100 days of prayer. This was to bring the community together as they were to face the challenge (or conflict) of having to raise \$80,000 for the first part of the restoration project.⁶⁶ Since Jesse Lee UMC was already facing scarcity in finance, this was a huge conflict. In order to address this conflict, I have come up with a slogan, “Strengthening Our Spiritual Foundation, Restoring The Sanctuary Foundation.” This phrase was used as I set up a calendar from April 14th to July 21st for people to sign up for a day to pray for the success of this project. Despite the announcements, mention of the project in the church newsletter, and advertisement during the service with inclusion in the bulletin announcement, I was not able to fill all the days for a commitment to pray and had 20 people (excluding myself) to participate.

Before the prayer campaign ended the funding for the first phase of restoration came through a generous donor who paid the whole \$80,000 for the project.

Through this process I begin to observe that my project can become a source of conflict if I did not communicate not only to my site team but also to the church council. This was a challenge as there were already so many issues that were being addressed by the council that the meetings were already becoming long and I often did not have time to present my report. In addition, I have found that information can be shared but obtaining of the information depends on the receiver of the information. The leadership was pre-

⁶⁶ The restoration of the foundation of the sanctuary was estimated to be \$150,000 project that was divided into three phases. The first phase was to address the foundation that was already sinking and could cave in the near future by the areas where the grand piano and organ console are located. This was budgeted to be \$80,000.

occupied by the issue of financial crisis of the church and was not able to obtain any other information than what was going to solve the financial crisis.

Despite the success in gaining funds for restoration project, Jesse Lee UMC continued to struggle with the general funds for everyday operation. In addition, there were people in the leadership who were beginning to share their frustration in many discussions on how to address the scarcity of the funds but no actual actions for implementation. I have thought this would be a great opportunity to introduce the US congregational survey that will help the congregation get a better picture of Jesse Lee UMC.

Tool becomes the litmus test for presence of conflict.

The survey questions caused discomfort to some people. Some members felt that the questions regarding personal finance and giving were invasive and made them feel uncomfortable. This also raised a question of trust within the Jesse Lee UMC. One of the reasons for the discomfort regarding the questions on finance may be due to how information from the survey might be used to investigate who is giving how much to the church. Since the survey was done anonymously and the questions were analyzed by a third party, which was explained to the congregation, this suspicion had very little validity.

A few of the congregation members felt that the survey had no place in the worship. The US Congregation had instructed that the survey be taken during the worship. This was not received well by the congregation. Despite the careful planning by the Church Council to bring the survey as part of its spiritual concern, many people felt it was inappropriate.

This already reviewed that there is presence of conflict in Jesse Lee UMC.

How the survey was used?

For purposes of this demonstration project, data and results related to spiritual connections of the congregation and the changes made between two surveys will be discussed.

US Congregations states, “Spiritual connections are made through worshipers’ private devotional activities and their participation in congregational activities such as worship.” There are six questions that address the spiritual connections of the congregation.

The first question asks “How often the people do private devotional activities (such as prayer, meditation, or reading the Bible alone)?” The first survey reports 51% of the survey participants do private devotional activities “everyday or most days” while the second survey reports 58% participate in such a way. Another change is in those who responded to less often or never do devotional activities. For the first survey, 49% of the participant responded they do less often or never do devotional activities while 37% of the participant responded on the second survey.

On the spiritual growth of the congregation, the participants from the first survey responded to the question, “Have you grown in your faith?” The number of those who responded to have had much growth decreased from 20% to 16%, while those who responded that they had some growth increased from 43% to 50%.

The third question on the spiritual connection asks, “To what extent does the worship services or activities of this congregation help you with everyday living?” Little difference was indicated between the first and second administration of the survey.

When asked to agree or disagree to the statement, “My spiritual needs are being met in this congregation.” the responses from the two survey varied as follows: first

survey reports 23% “strongly agree” and 66% “agree” while the second survey indicates 40% and 45%, respectively. Regarding respondents who indicated that they either “strongly agree,” or “agree,” there was little variation in percentages across the two surveys. There is greater difference between “strongly agree” and “agree” between two surveys where second survey reflects increase of 17% who “strongly agree” that their spiritual needs are being met in the congregation.

How the focus groups were used?

Before the focus group I wanted to start the work of awareness of the “healthy” and “unhealthy” congregation. Therefore, I had introduced to the congregation an article, “Autopsy of Decease Church: 11 Things I have Learn.” The author presents eleven (11) characteristics or behaviors of a church that is dying. There were some similar characteristics between the eleven items listed in the article and Jesse Lee UMC.

During the focus group, the group was asked to define these word “community”, “biblical/faith community”, and “Jesse Lee Community.” The group defined them as follows:

COMMUNITY	BIBLICAL-FAITH COMMUNITY	JESSE LEE COMMUNITY
Town	Church	Small
School	Meetings	Family
Commonality	Food (Methodist)	Loving
Church	Denomination (various kind)	Supportive
Fund/helping each other	Style of Worship	Aging
Spirit	Heritage	Home
Attitude	Doctrine/Teaching	Opportunity
	Sunday school	Supportive individual
	Sermons	Who were welcoming
	Leadership	Friendly
	Music	Celebrating
	People	Nurturing
		Committed
		Diverse (personality & difference in each person)
		People (inserted by me)
		Music
		Food
		togetherness
		bonding
		Acceptance

Here, the group made an assumption that community automatically is defined as people who gather under these words. However, if the word “people” is not included in the definition then the purpose of being a community together may be misunderstood. As for the definition of the “faith/biblical community” an assumption was made by the group that God is include in the definition without articulation. A famous proverb tells us, “Out of sight, Out of mind.” As such when we don’t think to put in the definition the words “people” and “God” we will forget that these two words are the base and foundation of the “faith/biblical community.” When we understand this the goal and directives of the church will have different directions than when people gather for the sake of gathering.

This difference in articulating these words is crucial in how the Jesse Lee UMC reflects and evaluates itself.

An example of how Jesse Lee UMC may forget the people is reflected in one of the discussions at the church council meeting. As the leadership was evaluating the few dinners hosted by the church as a fundraiser, an idea was brought to the table to run a takeout dinner as a fundraiser. This is to minimize the work that requires for set up of tables and chairs for the dinner. The last two dinners hosted by the church had low attendance and the work was too great. Since the purpose of the dinners was to raise funds for the church, an idea was suggested by an outsider that Jesse Lee offer takeout dinners on Fridays. This is a perfect example of what happens when the church forgets that real purpose of church is to build connection. In order for a “true community” is to be build the time is required with activities that direct people into building connection. When there is a true community then there are resources to address the scarcity and enduring differences that cause conflict.

CHAPTER 6

HOW DOES JESSE LEE UMC ENGAGE SCRIPTURES?

As people enter Jesse Lee UMC from the front door, there are pieces of history of the church that can be experienced. There is the picture of an old farm building that used to be a Jesse Lee Chapel, there is a letter from the one of the first male members of the church, and there is the picture of Jesse Lee UMC bicentennial anniversary with all the members and pastors who served at Jesse Lee. But there are no scriptures that reflect the vision or the mission of the church. As the person enters the sanctuary, he or she will see a very quaint New England sanctuary with pews that are 200 years old and beautiful red carpet and red pew cushions for people to be able to endure the old wooden pews. Each section of the pew has a Bible for the worshippers but no visible scriptures. There is a pulpit Bible that is opened to the same page each week. In front of the sanctuary are the pipes for the pipe organ, the only pipe organ in the Town of Easton. After the worship the person is invited to walk deeper into the church to a fellowship hall that is great in size for any imaginable activities. When Jesse Lee UMC had its own preschool it was used as a gym for kids to run and play during bad weather. There are six bulletin boards, but none of them has a scripture written on it. The bulletin board was a recent addition to the hall as the congregation got excited over the new pastor and the new project.

A person can be in Jesse Lee building all day and never have to encounter the Bible unless they are invited by the pastor as she reads the scriptures for the sermon. One of the first attempts at engaging Bible with the congregation by me, the new pastor, was

to include an introduction to the scriptures being read on Sunday. The response was positive and people appreciate the context in which the scripture was read. This allowed them to follow the reading much easier and understood the connection between the scripture and the sermon even before the sermon was preached. However, the traditional way of doing Bible study to engage the congregation has not been successful. During special time of the Christian year, like Advent and Lent, a Bible study was offered with several optional days for participation. The most number of participants I was able to have was 12 from three classes offered. Those who desired to participate in the class were often struggling to attend the meeting on time. In addition, there is an unspoken culture of “not doing church too much.” If the person was participating in church activities more than once a week besides Sunday, this was too much time spent on church. In addition, many who are the core members of the church felt they were already spending too much time volunteering at the church that they had no time to give towards a Bible study.

Goal:

The goal of this section of the project was to encourage the congregation to engage the Bible as they experience conflict in the church. There are known methods in which the Bible will be engaged in order to learn the importance of community, how to embrace the conflict, and practice spiritual disciplines prescribed in the Bible in forming spiritual formation, so that the people can be informed of the spiritual disciplines, which will form spiritual formation.

Bible Engagement

What is “Bible engagement?” Bible engagement is an event in which the scriptures are mediated by a person or a community of faith, where meaning is made, and

the meaning leads to reflective actions that can sustain and nurture the life of the person or the community.

A crucial work of Bible engagement is interpretation of the scriptures. At a quick glance at the biblical text we may not be aware that the world in which the scriptures is written is “other” than the world we currently inhabit. Interpretation of the scriptures seeks to find answers to, “What kind of world does the text belong to? What are its time, places, cultures and traditions reflected in the text?” “How do we make sense of the words, signs, and symbols that are from the “other” world reflected in the text?” “What is the text?” “How does text speak to me knowing the information about the text?” “What message of action or actions do I find in the text?”

In his book, *African Americans and the Bible*, Wimbush speaks of interpreting the scripture in terms of pretext, context, subtext and appropriation⁶⁷:

Pretext – “what comes before, leads to,” including the “historical-comparative contexts and back grounds;”

Text – (my addition), words in the text informs the reader.

Context – “the weaving together [*con-texere*] of worlds [*textura, textus*] into a history;”

Subtext – “getting under [sub], viewing from different perspectives the implications of, the things woven [*textus*]

Appropriation – “so what,” the implication, what does the pretext, text, context, and subtext call the community to feel, do think, become?

In Bible engagement, after the proper interpretation method of communication (mediation) becomes an important mechanism for how the scriptures bring meaning to a

⁶⁷ Vincent L Wimbush and Rosamond C. Rodman, *African Americans and the Bible: Sacred Texts and Social Textures* (New York: Continuum, 2000).

person or a group. The Bible cannot be said to have engaged a person or community unless it leads to appropriation. The cycle of hermeneutics as prescribed above is not complete until appropriation is achieved, and it is cyclical after the appropriation the participant is to go back to the beginning of the process. In order to sustain this process it needs to be done in a community.⁶⁸ Without a community it becomes difficult to sustain and nurture the meanings made; for it is the people that make the sustaining and nurturing possible.

For example, a person is engaging the Bible with the passage from Romans 8:11-

13. He or she engages the Bible through the following hermeneutics:

Pretext

Letters from Greco-Roman antiquity include imperial decrees addressed to subjects in a particular area, such as that by the Roman emperor Claudius to “the city of Alexandria” in Egypt in 41 CE concerning Jewish agitation for citizens’ rights; collections of philosophical letters by prominent figures like Cicero...and hundreds of papyri from Egypt document the concerns of ordinary people.

...

The letter [of Paul to the Romans] was occasioned in part by circumstances in Rome during the reign of the emperor Nero (54-68 CE). ...The recent return of Jews to the imperial capital, including Jewish believers in Christ like Prisca and Aquila, who had been driven out and probably lost property and community ties during their exile, may have aroused tensions within house groups (Rms. 16.5) in which [non-Judean].Gentile believers had become predominant.

...

Given the horrors of an anti-Jewish pogrom in Alexandria in Egypt (38-41 CE), and even more recent market tax riots that had turned deadly in Puteoli (a city south of Rome), Paul was concerned to prevent in Rome the sort of civic disturbance in which the city’s minority Jewish population would be especially vulnerable. This danger may explain the notorious exhortation to “be subject to the governing authorities” (Rms. 13:7). Similarly, Paul’s admonitions regarding the “weak in faith” concerned

⁶⁸ See Appendix J.

with the observance of diet and special days (Rms. 14:1-15.13), address tensions between Jews who retained their observance of the law and Gentile believers in Christ who did not.⁶⁹

Text

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you. So then, brothers and sisters, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh—for if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. (Romans 8:11-13 NRSV)

Context – (verse 5-13)

Life in the spirit. Here follows a series of antitheses, setting the condition of the man who is ‘in Christ’ in contrast with the evil condition described in chapter vii. The contrast has already been drawn in various ways – slavery and freedom, death and life, and so forth. The fresh element in the present passage is the identification of the new life with life **in the Spirit**, as contrasted with the *flesh*. If we recall that ‘Spirit’ fundamentally means for Paul divine or supernatural power for the ends of love as seen in Christ, it is evident that there is here a real step forward in the exposition.

Observe, however, how Paul has passed insensibly from **the Spirit of God** to **the Spirit of Christ**. In the next verse he takes a further step, and, with no perceptible change of meaning, speaks of **Christ within you**. This apparent equation, **Spirit of God = Spirit of Christ = Christ within you**, is characteristic of Paul among New Testament writers. ...We may perhaps trace the lines of his thought thus: First, for Paul Christ was in the fullest way the manifestation of God, and His whole life and person the expression of the divine Spirit. Further, it was the common postulate of primitive Christianity...that the Church was a fellowship of the Spirit, a community of those who had received the Spirit of God through faith in Christ.

What then is the effect of this life in the Spirit in relation to the heritage of death which every son of Adam has? (v.11) this does not mean that the ‘body,’ or organic individuality in such, is doomed to perish, for **if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells within you, then He who raised Christ from the dead will also make you mortal bodies live by His indwelling Spirit in your lives.** in Rom viii.12, he begins, **Well then, my brothers, we owe a duty – but it is not a duty to the flesh!”**...he supports his precept by a short note on flesh and spirit, so here

⁶⁹ Neil Elliott, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version*, 4th Edition, Michael D. Coogan, ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1591-1594.

he supports it by the observation (which recapitulates what has gone before), **If you live by the flesh, you are on the road to death; but if by the Spirit you put the action of the body to death, you will live.** Here the **body** is the **sinful body** of vi.6, the individuality as identified with the ‘flesh’: according to v. 6 it is ‘crushed’; according to viii. 10 it is a **dead thing**. Nevertheless, its **actions** still need to be **put to death** in detail. As we might put it, although a new dominant sentiment has been formed, the mental and physical habits acquired under the old *regime* persist as tendencies, and must be fought by self-discipline, as Paul confesses in 1Cor. IX. 25-27.⁷⁰

Subtext

Paul is very clear that two entities cannot co-exist in one body. In our spiritual body, this not only may refer to a person but also the body of Christ, cannot host both our **flesh** and **spirit**. Therefore, we are called to destroy the **flesh** in order that we may have life.

Appropriation

What is required for us to live? Our body has to be healthy for us to live. An unhealthy body is dying, while the pace of dying may differ from a person to person, illness will soon or later lead to death. Health of a body is maintained through practice of healthy food and exercise. Our spiritual life is like our physical body, we have to feed our spirit healthy food and practice disciplines that will keep us healthy.

After this process of hermeneutics, the person reflects on what it means for him or her to keep the spiritual body healthy. In her attempt to practice spirituality, she will soon learn that her experience of spiritual formation is not possible without a community. Dallas Willard writes, “The disciplines of abstinence must be counter-balanced and supplemented by disciplines of engagement (activity).” It’s choosing to participate in activities that nurture our souls and strengthen us for the race ahead.⁷¹ An element of spiritual discipline that nurtures our soul is the community in which we practice this together.

⁷⁰ C. H. Dodd *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (New York: Harper & Row, 1932), 121-128.

⁷¹ Bible.org, “Spiritual Disciplines,” <https://bible.org/illustration/spiritual-disciplines> (accessed February 2, 2014).

According to William Metcalf in his book, *16 Methods of Group Bible Study*, there are multiple ways to engaging the Bible. Metcalf tells us there are three reasons for people not wanting to participate in the Bible. They are: 1) “the words studied are weak and irrelevant, or (2) the people do not really want to study, or (3) the presentation of the Word to the people is unattractive.”⁷² Metcalf’s work on different approaches to Bible study can also be understood in terms of multiple intelligence learning. Different people learn in different ways. This approach of recognizing the differences in learning is also applicable to sermons as Thomas Troeger tells us, even in preaching “thinking involves thinking more than one way.”⁷³ Yet, we often treat the way in which we bring the Bible to the life of the congregation as though everybody thinks, learns, and makes meaning it the same.

In my approach to Bible Engagement, I have first looked to the question of how to bring the words in the Bible in such a way that different people with different learning abilities can see the relevance in the Bible and their lives. For example, in designing the 5-Minute Devotional for Day 3, I have included the sight, touch and feel as part of the devotion for that day. As the person opens up the devotional, he or she will read the scripture for the day, “For it is the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, ‘The one who is righteous will live by faith.’” (Romans 1:17). Then the person will see a daughter up in the air and her father ready to catch her. The expression on the daughter’s face is one of joy and excitement knowing that her father is ready to catch her in his arm. It leads the reader to a memory of excitement, comfort and

⁷² William Metcalf, *16 Methods of Group Bible Study* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1980), 7.

⁷³ Thomas H. Troeger and H. Edward Everding, *So That All Might Know: Preaching That Engages the Whole Congregation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2008), 22.

joy that they may have experienced like this little girl. Then the person is guided into interpretation of the words which tells us, “Faith is not ‘believing in something without proof,’ but trusting in someone in a participating way. It is not just thinking with our minds, it is assenting with our lives. It is how we get it on the righteousness of God.” Which if followed by the words from Ernest Hemingway is an assurance but also a challenge, “The best way to find out if you can trust somebody is to trust them.”

There is an evidence of biblical illiteracy in Jesse Lee UMC. The culture of Sunday school is not a familiar concept. The people know the need for Sunday school; however, the culture is not a familiar one. For example, I have told a joke that reflects on the common culture of Sunday school. This joke relies on that often the things we learn in Sunday school is about Jesus and half the questions children are asked, often the answer is “Jesus.” The joke tells of a Sunday school where a teacher asks the children to guess what she is describing. She asks, “What has a bushy tail with big black eyes, like to climb trees and collect nuts and hide them?” To this one child loudly shouts, “Jesus!” There is a question of my delivery of the story, but many in the congregation did not get the story or understood the reference of why the child mistaken what is apparently a description of squirrel to Jesus in the. Only a few who understood the Sunday school culture came and told me that they got the joke.

While the reasons given by Metcalf may be at play here in Jesse Lee for lack of interest in studying the Bible, there are possibly other reasons for why the people shy away from the study of and engagement with the Bible. I have discovered at least two additional reasons for lack of interest in the participation of the Bible study.

The first reason for the refusal to be in the Bible study is the political ideology that may oppress a group of people. For example, the interpretation of the Bible has always been an issue as the interpretation and accepted theological meaning of the scriptures in the Bible were determined by the majority, those who were the politically powerful. The method used in the Bible Engagement was also the method that made sense to these politically powerful. Hence, if anyone was not of the majority they saw very little relevance of the Bible to their own personal life. Two recent examples of this will be the slavery in the United States where the slave owners would use the scriptures on slave obeying master as a way to encourage the slave to be subservient to their owners and legalize slavery.⁷⁴ Second example is the way in which scriptures were used to isolate the non-heterosexual community. Just like the time of slavery, the Bible has been used by the major power in the Bible community to devalue those who are non-heterosexuals. As one of the interviewee, who is part of the homosexual community, painfully articulate, “It has been used to hurt me.” Unfortunately, the Bible often became a tool that hurt people before they were even given a chance to see it for themselves.

The second reason is time. As I reflect on the issue of time, I’ve decided to compare the previous generation and current generation on lack of time issue. While there are many inventions created to help assist people in making everyday choices less burdensome, we live in an age where time is becoming an increasingly scarce commodity. In order to address the need for more time, many more inventions were created such as the cell phone, laptops, cell phones with computing capabilities, tablets

⁷⁴ The irony in this bit of history is that while the slaves attended mandatory worship service sponsored by the slave owners to hear the scriptures used against them; after the worship service the slaves would gather on their own to find comfort in the Exodus story about how God has freed the slaves from Egypt.

that do much of what a computer does but is much more portable, and books on tape. Yet, those of who are utilizing these inventions are finding that they are more stressed for time.

There is also a debate on whether people in the U. S. work too much or not.⁷⁵ The Center for American Progress reported that “A typical American middle-income family puts an average of eleven (11) more hours a week in 2006 than 1979.”⁷⁶

There are numerous books and articles that address the conflict between time for family, work and other activities.⁷⁷ This is a growing concern as more and more families are becoming dual-income homes where children are often sent to a day care or after school program in order to assist parents who need to work. The sense of lack of time does not disappear in the lives of the people.

Families in Jesse Lee UMC reflect this work and family conflict as well as a new syndrome called a “sandwich generation.”⁷⁸ With increasing hours of work, having to attend to the children, and having elderly parents to care for often leads to very stressful and intense situation. These and other obligations make it difficult for adults to even find time for rest. Unless the person has found rewards that are not found in any other places, taking additional time to come to the Bible study is not a priority in their lives. This

⁷⁵ Gordon T. Anderson, “Do Americans Work Too Much? Some Social Critics Say Yes -- and Point to Europe as a Labor Model,” October 9, 2003, http://money.cnn.com/2003/10/06/pf/work_less/ (accessed February 2, 2014).

⁷⁶ Joan C. Williams and Heather Boushay, “The Three Faces of Work-Family Conflict: The Poor, the Professionals, and the Missing Middle,” Center for American Progress, <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/labor/report/2010/01/25/7194/the-three-faces-of-work-family-conflict/> (accessed February 2, 2014).

⁷⁷ Yahoo search on “Family-Work in conflict” resulted in 40,200,000 search results. Online catalogue website Worldcat.org has produced 37,410 resources on “Work and Family in Conflict.”

⁷⁸ The term “sandwich generation” comes from having a situation where husband and wife find themselves having to take care of their parents as a caregiver while having to care for young children.

means there is a need to bring the Bible to the people who do not have time. Another word, with the invitation to engage in the Bible, there must be a strategic design in making the Bible engagement accessible to the people.

In order for the Bible Engagement to be effective, there needs to be an audience who is willing to open themselves to the experience. Once there is an audience then there needs to be effective methods to mediate meanings, to assist learners in the creation of meanings, and to nurture and sustain the meanings communicated and created.

For example, I had a family quietly approached me one day that it was hard for them to bring their teenager to church because their child had a special need where he needed a visual to comprehend things. While the preacher may be able to verbalize the biblical scriptures with different illustrations, it was not enough for the teen, a visual learner, to be able to create an image through verbal illustration. In this instance, the meanings that were pronounced never connected to the listener.

In my application of this method I found that not only did the visuals help the teenager, they also helped an elderly person who had difficulty hearing. When I had incorporated a video clip of a movie into my sermon to help illustrate a message from scriptures, it helped the person make the meaning between the scripture for that day and the message the speaker was trying to convey to the audience.

Another way in which the meaning can be mediated is with the use of pictures. By using images that corresponds to the biblical scriptures a person is able to visually connect the scriptures with the meaning made. Once the meaning is mediated the person can use prayer and meditation as a way to sustain and nurture the meaning.

The multiple intelligence learning theory has opened our eyes to how people learn and make meaning. The old way of thinking regarding intelligence is based on theorists like Jean Piaget, who understand “intelligence” and meaning making only in terms of cognitive activity based heavily in linguistic and analytical processes of the mind. However, through the work of Howard Gardner on multiple intelligences a new school of thought had risen and our understanding of intelligence recognizes that not all people make meaning and learn the same way. This is the challenge and opportunity for Bible engagement, to consider and discern what methods, processes, and activities to conduct for mediating, making, nurturing and sustaining meanings in particular faith communities.

Implementation

Throughout this project I have designed and intentionally incorporated the worship service, church meetings, Bible Study and daily devotions to focus on engagement with the Bible for informing spiritual formation in response to conflict for regenerating the health of JLUMC. First, the message that conflict is an opportunity was shared through the sermons. As soon as I observed anxiety among the congregation due to the conflict regarding the need to find a replacement for the treasurer of the church, I begin preaching about seeing conflict as an opportunity for God to do new things. On May 12, 2013, I preached from the Book of Acts chapter 16, the story of Paul and Silas in prison.

Pretext of this text is that the Book of Acts is written around 70 C. E. It is written around the time of the temple destruction and “subsequent developments within the Jewish community.”

The text read is Acts 16:16-34 and it is a story of Paul and Silas going to a prison for a wrong reason. They are singing and praying in the prison. They experience an earthquake that opens the door of the jail cell. Instead of escaping, Paul and Silas stay inside of the prison and wait for the jail guard to find them. The life of the jail guard is saved and in response they are invited to visit the guard's home.

Context tells us that Paul and Silas responded to the injustice with praise and prayer instead of a demand for fairness. In addition, when a miracle happens (earthquake opening the jail door) they did not just walk out the door and escape but stayed inside until the guard found them. Starting with verses 27-31 we are told the guard feared his own execution for allowing the prisoners escape. It is possible that Paul and Silas knew this for they made sure the guard was aware that they did not escape, which saves the guard's life. In response to this human salvation by people of faith, the guard is given an opportunity to have salvation from God.

By sharing this understanding of the scripture, the members of the congregation who was anxious about replacing the church treasurer are informed of spiritual disciplines and how to form spiritual formation through a conflict. This was the beginning of raising awareness in the congregation that conflict can be an opportunity for God to do new things.

After that I have designed eight sermons with multiple intelligence in mind as a method of delivery. The sermon on September 15, 2013⁷⁹ is a good example of how a movie clip was used as a tool to illustrate the message about being a community that challenged as well as inspired the congregation.

⁷⁹ See Appendix D. This is a manuscript of the sermon preached and video clip used is included in the DVD with all the media materials and recordings used in this project.

On this Sunday the lectionary readings used were from 1 Timothy chapter 1 verses 12 to 17 and Luke chapter 15 verses 1 to 10. I have focused on doing the hermeneutics on the 1 Timothy⁸⁰ and took a hint from Rev. G. Penny Nixon's commentary on the Gospel of Luke 15:1-10. Rev. Nixon challenges the other preachers to think of these very familiar parables in terms of "welcoming and saving"⁸¹ in conjunction with the 1 Timothy's hospitality.

As an invitation to engaging the Bible, I have given introduction to the scripture readings so that the congregation can hear it with some context of the reading. One of the challenges in reading scriptures for the audience is that, especially when the audience is not familiar with the Bible, the words read will be just noises that fill the air. For to tell the congregation that I will be reading from 1 Timothy does not give them the information that the letters to Timothy is part of the pastoral letters and that it was written in the name of Paul to Timothy and the main point of the reading.⁸²

As I reflect on the "welcoming and salvation" with "hospitality", it reminded me of the "radical hospitality."⁸³ This is defined as follows:⁸⁴

The Congregational Practice of Radical Hospitality

Congregations that practice Radical Hospitality demonstrate an active desire to invite, welcome, receive, and care for those who are strangers so that they find a spiritual home and discover for themselves the unending

⁸⁰ See Appendix F.

⁸¹ Stephen L. Cook, David Lyon Bartlett, and Barbara Brown Taylor, *Feasting on the Word. Preaching the Revised Common Lectionary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), 71.

⁸² See Appendix I. An example of an introduction to the scripture and the scripture read.

⁸³ "Radical Hospitality" is a term coined by United Methodist Bishop Robert Schnase in *Five Practices of Fruitful Congregations* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2007), 11-32.

⁸⁴ Robert Schnase, "Five Practices," <http://fivepractices.org/radical-hospitality> (accessed February 2, 2014).

richness of life in Christ. Radical describes that which is drastically different from ordinary practices, outside the normal, that which exceeds expectations and goes the second mile.

The Personal Practice of Radical Hospitality

Radical Hospitality in our personal walk with Christ begins with an extraordinary receptivity to the grace of God. In distinctive and personal ways, we invite God into our hearts and make space for God in our lives. We say Yes to God and open ourselves to the spiritual life. We accept God's love and acceptance of us. We receive God's love and offer it to others.

Then the congregation is questioned on their own understanding of how to be welcoming? This question is followed by a movie clip from "Lars and The Real Girl."⁸⁵ This movie clip had sound bites that challenge the congregation about their comfort zone and how much they have extended themselves to be welcoming and loving. Part of this message is that we need to move away from looking at Jesse Lee UMC from what I want and move towards what we want.

The video was able to transmit much more than just speaking and describing the story. It showed characters that told stories behind the stories through the actions of the person, the clothes they wore, and expressions on their face that words alone would have missed. It allowed some of the people who were unable to follow just the words due to their own learning abilities to participate in the process of meaning making. By watching the images with the words in the video the people were engage in the meaning making of the word "community."

Reuel Howe tells us, "If the dialogical process is to be an indispensable part of preaching, it will require of preacher and people that they participate as partners in order

⁸⁵ I have used a movie trailer I have found in YouTube.com. It summarized the movie with all the sound bites that I need the congregation to hear to challenge them about how welcoming and how willing they were to see things from other side.

to ensure a meeting of meaning from both sides.”⁸⁶ The participation of the people happens when ideas are present in the way the people can engage in the conversation. Thomas H. Troeger talks about using Multiple Intelligence as a way to remove the barriers between the preacher and the congregations. When sermons are preached with the people to whom it addresses, then it becomes a powerful tool in sharing meanings made.

In Bible study on the Book of Romans, to give some insight into what Paul was trying to relay to his contemporaries, I provided some historical, cultural, and social background of the world in which Paul and his peers lived. Each session started with a picture from Rome to give a sense of geography of the place. Each Bible study also provided an opportunity for spiritual formation. I have used the *Life with God Bible* as a tool to select passages that address different spiritual disciplines and ask the participants to reflect on the scripture and find their own thoughts on the scripture and the spiritual discipline. They were also asked to think about how these scriptures may relate to their life situation. In addition, in week five I used the *Lectio Divina*⁸⁷ as a way to read Romans 14:1-12.

During this process something unexpected, but hoped for, happened. In week two of Bible study one of the participants and I waited for the other participant to arrive. This gave us some time for a casual conversation. As we talked the participant, PG shared how she was shocked one Sunday to hear the scripture readings as she found them familiar.

⁸⁶ Reuel L. Howe, *Partners in Preaching: Clergy and Laity in Dialogue* (New York: Seabury Press, 1967), 47.

⁸⁷ *Lectio Divina* is an ancient method of reading the Bible. The scripture is read three times during the *Lectio Divina* where after each reading the participants are asked to reflect on the words read and think of the words that stays with them after the reading. It is done in a prayerful manner and each person gets to share their own thoughts on the reading.

She realized that they were the words spoken by Tony Robbins at his motivational conferences. This led to a discussion about how people have been using the Bible as a tool for wisdom in living. Then, we begin to explore the difference in which the way the scriptures are used in the church in contrast to the ways the scriptures are used by others. This led us to greater understanding of how the Bible is engaged outside of the church. It also reminded me how little the Bible is engaged and we give away the power of the Bible in life.

By the second week of the Bible study it was clear that I was not going to get more than 4 people to participate in the Bible study. Despite the fact that I offered the study at two different times: One session was offered during a weeknight and another session was offered during a weekday. Additional effort was made to invite more people to the Bible study by trying to have the study at a home of a couple that were home bound. However, the effort ended after the first try as the couple decided it was not something they felt they could commit to doing. Several factors may be related to this incident. One may be that the method of the study was unfamiliar to them. Another factor may be that the topic caused discomfort. When we began the discussion of “sin” and I challenged the group to think about if wasting food while people go hungry a sin. This idea that we are all guilty of sinning and no one has the right to claim righteousness had made the wife feel uncomfortable. There are many reasons why this may have led the person to feel discomfort. One may be the fact that I am a pastor and my statement carried more weight on the individual than the words of other. Second, they were not comfortable with the idea of being a sinner, which they may have associated with not being a good person. Third, the definition of sin used by me was not a shared or common

understanding with the wife. Also, the person had difficulty hearing and it is possible that the person misunderstood what was being said at the moment. I have also found myself having to take a longer amount of time to go through each section of the study in order for the people to comprehend the ideas and process. The second group was made up of people who were in their 70's and 80's and when I had used the power point presentation it seem to have communicated the process more clearly than when I tried to use the print out of the power point presentation.

The sermons offered during worship and the devotions used during church business meetings have helped the congregation stop responding to an anxiety. People vent about the frustration and anxiety of not knowing how the church will continue with the ministry. Yet, people did not stop or leave the community. Instead, the people have begun to slowly take part in becoming part of a solution to a problem. The most significant change came from a member of the site team who initially expressed her frustration because it was difficult for her to understand me.

Christine L. had been fighting her call into ministry. A year before I became the pastor of Jesse Lee, her financial situation had forced her into moving into her parents' home and returned to join Jesse Lee UMC. She has refused to engage in the Bible and she later confessed that despite her regular attendance she was not fully engaged in the worship. She sang in the choir and she was just content with being able to enjoy the music.⁸⁸ I had invited her to be part of my site team for the project and this encouraged her to become more exposed to the Bible study and even attend lay speaking class.

⁸⁸ There are many people in Jesse Lee who come to worship for the music. While the music director is very spiritual and the choir sings songs of faith that are biblically based, there is no intestinal means to help connect people with the Bible.

However, she kept fighting the call and her life situation did not improve. Finally, she gave into God's calling and decided to accept the call into ministry. At the same time opportunities started to open up for her and she was able to gain full-time employment that fits her gifts and desires and entered the seminary to begin the ordination process.

Christine L. shared with me that when she let go of her resistance she found the Bible relevant. She especially appreciated the Bible study method that allowed her to explore the Bible and share meanings made with other participants.⁸⁹

Another person who had participated in the devotions volunteered with her daughter who is in her tween years to help set up the communion each month. She had participated in the Bible study before the project but had always found it difficult to find time to come to Bible study. She also shared the devotional with her sister who then joined this group.

John H., second interviewee, had shared with me that it was hard for him to commit to a Bible study as he is already coming to church once a week beside Sunday for the choir practice. In addition, he is heavily involved in other committees of the church and found the 5-minute devotional very helpful. He also expressed that the program helped him to increase his habit of praying each week. He found that there is a difference in his spirituality when he is able to have devotional time other than the Sunday worship service. In addition, he shared a story of how the devotional impacted him and his co-worker. He tells a story of a co-worker who was having a bad day due to some negative talk by her fellow workers about her. He was already aware that his co-worker was someone who had faith as she had shared how she was part of liturgical dance team in her

⁸⁹ Christine Lindeberg, interview with the author. Her comments can be heard in the video.

church. In order to encourage her, he had shared the devotional from day thirty-six.

While this was his way to encourage his co-worker and to put the message into an action, she responded back to him and told him how it helped her to forgive the people who gossip behind her back at work. She has asked if he can keep sharing the devotional with her in the future and look forward to having this available on more of a long term basis.

The devotional for day thirty-six addressed the spiritual discipline on encouragement. I had chosen the scripture from Romans chapter 14 verse 19, “Why do you pass judgment on your brother and sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God.” To show how a little encouragement can impact in big ways, I have chosen a picture of a tug boat pulling a large ship. Then I used a quote from William Arthur Ward, “Flatter me, and I may not believe you. Criticize me, and I may not like you, Ignore me, and I may not forgive you. Encourage me, and I will not forget you. Love me and I may be forced to love you.”

This story is an example of the pretext, text, context, subtext and appropriation at work. The pretext of the scripture from Romans chapter 14 verse 19 is that this is a letter to Rome by Paul and yet Paul is not the founder of the church in Rome. At the time of Paul “all the roads led to Rome.”⁹⁰ This meant that many people from different places and culture all gathered at Rome. Hence, the Book of Rome writer had a clear understanding of differences that came together in one place and the conflict that can rise from it. There was a strong sense of anti-Judaism. This probably included the Christians as the separation of Christianity from Judaism has yet to happen. Despite the hostile

⁹⁰ Dennis C. Duling, Norman Perrin, and Robert L. Fern, *The New Testament: Proclamation and Parenthesis, Myth and History* (Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace College, 1994), 239.

environment, by the time Paul writes to the church in Rome, there is a sizeable congregation in the Church of Rome.

In Romans chapter 14 verse 1 to chapter 15 verse 13, the context in which the letter is written is due to the conflict between those who were “the weak” and those who were “the strong.” This reference may be to those who were able to uphold Judaism as well as Christian teaching while there were those who were not able to observe all the Judaic laws. For example, the issue was eating rituals. While the Gentiles did not have restrictions in diet, the Jewish law was restricted in what they can eat and what they cannot. This was a good reason or a concern as it may have caused some dilemma in eating together as a community. For example, the Lord’s Supper as we understand it is simply bread and juice.⁹¹ However, the Last Supper shared by Jesus, which is where the Lord’s Supper was originated from was a full meal. If part of fellowship between Christians is to share food together, the restriction in diet will be a source of conflict. This letter addresses how to stay as community together in the midst of conflict.

The text asks the reader, “Why do you judge others?” This indicates that the reader does not have authority to judge anyone as everyone is in the same boat. The only person who can judge is God and we are all under the same penalty before God.

The subtext is the commentary from the *Life with God Bible*, indicating that judgment and criticism hurt a community. Therefore, anyone who speaks of others in judgmental or critical ways is hurting not the person but the community.

⁹¹ Juice is used for Holy Communion while wine may be used in other tradition. For the contemporary churches, the use of wine versus juice was also a source of conflict. During the Prohibition movement the Methodist decided to replace wine with juice and have kept this practice ever since.

The appropriation is the instruction to find words of encouragement towards others with the vision of what encouragement may do for others by picking the picture of the tug boat pulling the large cargo ship. After practicing the devotional, John H. had done the appropriation indicated and found the result to be true as he helped his co-worker be encouraged for that day.

CHAPTER 7

SPIRITUAL FORMATION THROUGH SPIRITUAL DISCIPLE

How can spiritual disciplines nurture and sustain a sense of community in the presence of conflict? When conflict happens the community that is in conflict will often be driven by anxiety and fear. This often means the group will seek quick answers to fix the problems. Many churches that experience financial difficulty try to find ways to use their largest assets, their building as a source of income. Often the decisions made in such a condition are quick fix answers. As such Jesse Lee UMC sought out a way to utilize the building as a way to solve the financial problems. Jesse Lee UMC has a lower level that was built to be a Sunday school class rooms. This space was built for Sunday school class rooms that became a space for nursery school, which later became Jesse Lee pre-school. The pre-school was a great source of income to church from 2000 to 2008.⁹² When the preschool closed due to lack of students in 2011 the space became available. There were offers to rent the space to be a daycare. The town of Easton only has one daycare and another daycare would have been welcomed. However, if the church rented the space to a daycare, which operates under long hours and five days a week, the space will be no longer available to Jesse Lee UMC. This invited the question of, “Does Jesse Lee UMC wants to grow where there might be a need for the space in the future?”

⁹² See Appendix B.

When a congregation begins to focus on its financial health as a measure for its health, it can misguide the congregation in decision making such as whether to give away the space for ministry. Spiritual disciplines will help the congregation in such an incident to discern ways to address the question of the future of the congregation. Through spiritual formation the people of Jesse Lee UMC will learn that the actual sustaining and nurturing of the community happens when the community discovers its identity through Bible Engagement and uses spiritual practices to continue to inform the spiritual formation that connects them to God. Part of sustaining and nurturing of a community is to address the conflict at hand with spiritual disciplines such as a prayer, Bible study, meditation, submission and worship as a way encounter conflict.

Goal

By encouraging the congregation to learn and use the spiritual disciplines as a way to interact with each other. A major accomplishment desired in this section is for the people to learn the definition of the spiritual disciplines. For example, the common understanding of prayer is to share the desire in hearts of each person. During the Prayers and Concerns time of the worship, people speak of the prayers that are often out of their own ability to address such as the terminal illness of a person. Prayers are seen as inactive activities in the life of the church. It is like a time when you express your wishes and hope that God will answer like the genie in the lamp would. Through the activities of Bible study, sermons in worship and devotional the congregation will be educated on the spiritual disciplines.

Spiritual Disciplines & Spiritual Formation

Spiritual disciplines are practices that inform the spiritual formation. John Wesley terms spiritual disciplines as “the means of grace,” which was the title of his sermon. In

this sermon he asks if there is any “means” to channel God’s grace? Then he answers this question with,

This question could never have been proposed in the apostolical church unless by one who openly avowed himself to be a heathon, the whole body of Christians being agreed that Christ had ordained certain outward means for conveying his grace into the souls of men. Their constant practice set this beyond all dispute; for so long as ‘all that believed were together, and had all things common’ (Acts 2:44), ‘they continued steadfastly in the teaching of the apostles, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayers’ (Acts 2:42).⁹³

The scripture from Acts 2:42, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” is the probably only reference in the Bible regarding actually practice of spiritual disciplines by the first disciples. It is a foundational model in which the church had followed to inform spiritual formation.

The spiritual disciplines listed and defined by Richard Foster and Dallas Willard is as follow:⁹⁴

Study—Spending time reading the Scriptures and meditating on its meaning and importance to our lives. We are nourished by the Word because it is our source of spiritual strength. Choose a time and a place to feed from the Word of God regularly.

Worship—Offering praise and adoration to God. His praise should continually be on our lips and in our thoughts. Read psalms, hymns, or spiritual songs, or sing to the Lord daily using a praise tape. Keep praise ever before you as you think of God’s mighty deeds in your life.

Prayer—Talking to and listening to God about your relationship with Him and about the concerns of others. Find time to pray to God without the distraction of people or things. Combine your prayer time with meditation on the Scriptures in order to focus on Christ.

Fellowship—Mutual caring and ministry in the body of Christ. Meet regularly with other Christians to find ways to minister to others. Encourage one another.

⁹³ John Wesley, Albert Cook Outler, and Richard P. Heitzenrater, *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), 158.

⁹⁴ bible.org, “Spiritual-disciplines.”

Confession—Regularly confess your sins to the Lord and other trusted individuals. As often as you are aware of sin in your life, confess it to the Lord and to those you may have offended.

Submission—Humbling yourself before God and others while seeking accountability in relationships. Find faithful brothers or sisters in Christ who can lovingly hold you accountable for your actions and growth in Christ.

These activities are practices that can help inform the spiritual formation in the congregation. The spiritual formation is the way of life for the Christians whose desire to follow the examples set by Jesus and building connection with God as Jesus did.

In the gospels we are told Jesus “would withdraw to deserted places and pray.”(Luke 5:16). In Luke chapter 6 verses 12 and 13, we are told Jesus prayed and called the twelve disciples to be called apostles. This is an example of how Jesus had used a spiritual discipline informing the spiritual formation. Another example of Jesus praying is a good example of how a conflict was encountered with a spiritual discipline to inform spiritual formation is Jesus going into prayer at the Gethsemane. Here Jesus is conflicted with the decision to go ahead with the plans to die on the cross. We see this as he tells his disciples, “I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and stay awake with me” (Matthew 26:38). The words used by Matthew expressed the depth of conflict Jesus was experiencing. He encounters this conflict in deep prayer as the Gospel of Luke tells us in chapter 22 verse 44, “In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground.” Through this prayer his informed of spiritual formation as he prays, “My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from me, yet not what I want but what you want” (Matthew 26:42).

Spiritual formation is a state of being where a person is no longer focusing on his or her desire for the outcome but willing to submit to God. This does not mean the person

gives up his or her self-determine will to make decision. Instead, the decision the person makes is a decision to be in connection with God as Jesus exemplified for us.⁹⁵ The spiritual disciplines found in other parts of the Bible, are told to communities of the Bible as a practice to be followed because they were not practicing them.

In a community that is in conflict the status of spiritual formation of the people in the community make the major difference in the outcome of the conflict. If a community in conflict consist of people who are aware of the life of spiritual formation, it is less likely that they will respond to the conflict negatively. The spiritual formation guides the people to ask, “Where is God in this?” The common response to conflict is to diagnose and find the source of the problem, which is the way to solve any problems. Furlong tells us the problem is in that, “we diagnose the conflict unconsciously, react emotionally, make choices and apply tools based on a poor diagnosis, and end up escalating the situation.”⁹⁶

The way in which conflict is addressed through spiritual discipline is a cyclical process. A community informed by the spiritual formation (initial desire to seek God is part of spiritual formation)⁹⁷ encounters conflict. Instead of reaction, the community will turn to the Bible that directs them to spiritual disciplines that will inform spiritual

⁹⁵ This is where the importance of interpretation of the Bible comes in to place. Once I heard a preacher on the radio talking about how Jesus offers wealth to people. I was dumbfounded that someone can be on radio with such a bad exegesis. In Matthew 8:20, we have Jesus saying to a scribe who wishes to follow him, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. (NRSV)” It is clear in this scripture that following Jesus was not about being on the road to riches.

⁹⁶ Furlong, *The Conflict Resolution Toolbox*, 2-3.

⁹⁷ In Gospel of John chapter 1 starting with verse 37, disciples are gathering around Jesus so that they can be in connection with God through the Messiah, the anointed or chosen one. The disciples have left their old life to follow Jesus. This is spiritual formation. As such, the church is a community that seeks to know God in their lives. The one hour they choose to spend at church is a reflection of the desire for this connection with God.

formation that is a regenerated community (who is ready for next phase of growth). The community after this process is no longer the same community initially started for the spiritual formation process has made them into a different community than it was before. A perfect example is the community of disciples of Jesus. They responded the call to Jesus and became a community. Each time they encounter a conflict (like the time when they were in a boat and faced a storm as the story is told in Matthew 8:23) they turn to Jesus for resolution. Jesus teaches them spiritual disciplines to address these conflicts and their faith is formed. Each process of spiritual formation becomes a growth process for the disciples as the last conflict that raise them to be without Jesus is when he is captured and tried to be hung upon the cross. This conflict broke the community as all the disciples flee from Jesus. After the resurrection Jesus brings the community back together and then become the leaders of building the church.

In spiritual formation a person is able to learn how to step away from self in relationship to the problem. Instead, it allows the person to learn and diagnose the conflict in the light of God. For example, when the people of Jesse Lee UMC were in the conflict of not having the treasurer of the church it was crucial for the people to see the situation as an opportunity for God to work with the people. Instead of looking at how this was going to impose on each individual with their time for volunteering and giving to the church, through spiritual formation each members of the church was asked to see the great opportunity that was present for the congregation, an opportunity to get more people involved. The Finance Committee was one of the examples of how it became an opportunity. From the time I entered Jesse Lee UMC as a pastor the Finance committee has met as a formality. Most of the work needed to be done by the committee was done

by one person, the church treasurer. This had to be changed when the church treasurer was physically removed from the community. The finance committee now has actual members who are actively working to solve the financial problems of the church.

Tools used and the result:

Spiritual formation is a process, in which takes time for one to see the change in a person. The process of discovering one's own identity and becoming one does not happen overnight. It is also something that requires practice.

One of the first attempts to bring spiritual discipline into the practices at Jesse Lee UMC was a 100 day prayer campaign. This was a response to the congregation starting the restoration of its foundation. As part of the bell tower restoration project the church discovered that the foundation of the church was in desperate condition. The funding needed for the project was more than what the congregation alone can support.

This was done in April of 2013. This was done before the official implementation of the project but it was the initial action to bring awareness in the congregation. I have taken this opportunity as a way to introduce spiritual disciplines to inform spiritual formation in the congregation by encouraging the congregation to start praying for God's guidance and provision. To make the connection between the conflict and the spiritual formation I wrote and used the slogan, "Strengthening Our Spiritual Foundation, Restoring the Sanctuary Foundation" project.⁹⁸ Each member of the church was asked to sign up for one day out of 100 days set for prayer and take time each day to pray for the future of the church.

⁹⁸ This was also an answer to the delay in implementing the project. I felt that as the leadership, which represents the majority of the congregation, was in deep struggle with the finance and the work of the building restoration I had to act to implement part of the project. I felt that bringing awareness to the congregation was the foremost importance as they were in denial of the conflict.

In actual implementation of the project the tools that were used to engage the Bible were also the tools used for the practices of spiritual disciplines to inform spiritual formation.

The classes were set for 6 weeks and the devotional was set for 42 days, which seem to be enough repetition for the people to feel the impact of its practice. The Bible study was not enough to make the difference. One of the participants has expressed eagerness to see another study start. There is definitely an interest by those who participate in the daily devotional for more practices of devotional in the future.

I have also intentionally brought devotional practices to the church business meetings. Instead of just having someone saying a prayer to open a meeting, I brought one of the devotionals that I felt was relevant to the agenda for the meeting. It is a way to encourage the dynamic of the conversation and how each person contributes to the meeting.

In addition, the worship was intentionally designed so that the sermon let people into self-reflection. The liturgy challenged them into asking questions of their spirituality. The hymns were chosen as confession, affirmation and assurance.

In measuring the change in spiritual formation there are two difficulties, the data are qualitative and period needed for change is often in years not days or months. However, from the responses I have received by the members of the church it was evident that there were changes occurring in the state of spiritual formation in the congregation of Jesse Lee UMC.

For an example, a member was getting quite upset about the church treasurer's moving. There were expressions of many emotional statements regarding this transition.

This difficult transition was combined with the conflicts in person's lives as there was loss of loved pets. However, after weeks of attending the worship and meetings where I preached and shared a devotional about conflict as an opportunity, the person came up to be one day to give me updates and repeated to me that "challenges are an opportunities." As the person shared this there was sense of peace about the person.

While I had hoped that I could set up a cell group it was evident that this was not something that can be forced. Instead, the Bible study groups that I had formed from the project slowly developed into this group at the end. By the third class on Tuesday night, a comment was made by a participant that as she knew the desire of the group was to grow and she appreciated the discussions and personal sharing among the group. By this time this group began to share prayers and helped each other with challenges in their lives.

The 5 Minute Daily Devotional was a project that was not easy to track. The effect of it was measured by the responses from the participants. They interacted with emails to ask for information and one of the participants reached out to make sure she continued to receive the devotional each day. Few responded through email that they found it helpful. The most tangible effect of the devotional was seen by the story shared by one of the participants, John Herlihy. In the interview he had shared that this helped him to increase his devotional/prayer time and felt it helped him to grow in his prayer life. He now is more willing to share in the prayers and concerns time during the worship. In addition, he told a story of how he had shared his devotion with his co-worker at work. John is a reserved man who does not easily share his thoughts with people. Yet, he tells of a story where he went out of his comfort zone and shared a devotional that he felt

would help his co-worker. John received a response from his co-worker for the appreciation of the sharing for it helped her gain different perspective into her troubles.

Worship service was one of the ways that I was able to gain the most participation in spiritual formation. By using multiple learning as a basis, I have designed the worship service to gain an audience of all different spectrums for spiritual formation. The liturgy was selected to address the message for the day. The sermon was designed with video clips and other visuals as a way to connect with the participants. An introduction was given before the scripture as a way to give context to the scriptures read for that day. There were times when I left a question open deliberately so that the people will leave with a way to ponder the subject. All these were ways to help form spiritual formation.

In addition, I shared materials such as the “Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 11 Things I learned” as a way to help the congregation reflect on their practices and their goal to become a vibrant congregation. Among the 11 things listed was, “The church rarely prayed together: In its last eight years, the only time of corporate prayer was a three-minute period in the Sunday worship service. Prayers were always limited to members, their friends and families, and their physical needs.”⁹⁹ This was true at Jesse Lee UMC. Many weeks the prayers were about people who were sick, celebration of births, and challenges of life. After this was introduced, more people were trying to add prayer for the world issues. However, the gathering of the people prayer outside of the Sunday worship is still unaddressed. In special occasions such as the Sandy Hook Shooting in December of 2012, I had opened the church for a whole week for prayers.

⁹⁹ Thom S. Rainer, “Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 11 Things I learned,” <http://thomrainer.com/2013/04/24/autopsy-of-a-deceased-church-11-things-i-learned> (accessed February 2, 2014).

Except for the first day of the week, no one came to pray. Another attempt at a prayer service was made for the first year anniversary of the Sandy Hook Shooting. This became an event and more people were willing to participate, however, the event cancelled due to hazardous weather condition.

There was an incident that may have more significance to Jesse Lee UMC than other congregations. For the first time in close to three years, there was a plea made to the congregation to help out one of their own. The congregation was good at helping people outside of Jesse Lee; it had difficulty making their work of helping each other visible. Jesse Lee practiced the scripture “not letting the left hand know what right hand does” very seriously.

There was a family who had been struggling with finances and almost lost their house. This had been going on for a while and now they were about to lose their only medical benefit they had through the wife as she no longer was able to work. After checking with the family, I had asked the congregation to help out the family who was in a very difficult situation. I was very clear that we were not trying to find a solution but just to make a gesture that the congregation cares for them. A collection was made of any cash or gift cards that the family can use. I had called the wife and asked if I can see her. She came to the parsonage and we chatted for a while. The wife updated me on their situation and there were some hope that was at a horizon. I explain to her that the church and I wanted to show her and her family that we cared; that we collected some money and gift cards to help them. She was touched and we both cried.

I reported to the congregation of the amount that was raised and the transaction that was taken place without mention of the name. But the wife wanted to share her

thanks to the congregation so she stood up right after my report and expressed her gratitude and the good news that doors were finally opening for the family. The sharing of thanksgiving for the family and from the family happened on the day when the church lost heat. It was one of the first cold Sundays and people came into the church with no heat. Immediately everyone pitched in and set up to have worship service in the fellowship hall. This is a picture of spiritual formation.

There are many indications that the congregation has grown in its spiritual formation, however, there are people who are unable to recognize this spiritual formation and see the relevance in the life of the church due to the struggling financial status. The challenge with the spiritual formation is that it takes time for a congregation to begin to see the result of its growth in fullest sense.

CHAPTER 8

NOW I KNOW MORE ABOUT

The ministerial competencies proposed in the Demonstration Proposal needed adjustment. The ministerial competencies I have chosen in the proposal were counselor, administrator, and professional skill. In my conversation with my advisor through the project another competency skill was addressed, vision holder. Vision holder is a spiritual leader in the group who is able to articulate the vision of the community as it goes through a process toward the vision. This is an important quality in the community as it struggles through a conflict. Especially in spiritual formation, the path in which the community goes through a transformation can be confusing and unclear. At times this journey could feel like being in a fog and the group needs a vision holder who can continue to guide them through till the end. A biblical example is the 40 years of wandering by the Israelites as they were led by Moses. If it wasn't for Moses, who was their vision holder, the Israelites would not have been able to come through the dessert. Below are the competencies that the site team felt will help me be a better minister at Jesse Lee United Methodist Church.

Competency 1: Counselor

Goal Be trained in Motivational Interviewing to be a better listener. One of the important roles of a pastor is to understand the people he/she serves. Even though I have been trained in listening and pastoral counseling, I have learned that I am still struggling with the need to answer before hearing the question in an attempt to solve the problem at hand. Therefore, this training will help me to be a slower to react and more attentive to listen so

that I can take more time to assess the situation before I seek out solution. This is one of the most important skills in conflict resolution.

- **Strategy** Study Motivational Interviewing and examine how it may apply in my work as a pastor who counsels parishioners. Also, find a spiritual director who can be part of self-reflection and example of how to listen.
- **Evaluation:** YangHee Christine Stopka has taken much time this year to visit parishioners in need due to illness, death and relationship conflict. Each of these individuals at times has had to share their fears, anxieties and loneliness. In these conversations Christine has worked hard to hold back solutions and advice on what to do and how to feel. She has kept a listening ear to allow her parishioners to simply express these emotions. Through prayer with them she validates their feelings and requests help and support through God and community. This was personally experienced by one of the site team members and felt supported by her, by the church community and by God. Through this project the site team has witnessed the growth/strength in Christine's level of spiritual counseling. Her strength and confidence has created an atmosphere of learning and confidence to those she counsels. She has become a source of greater understanding of a diversity of concerns that affect spirit.

Competency 2: Administrator

Goal One of the skills of an administrator is to have clarity and succinctness in defining and analyzing a task or problem. This is one of the key skills in conflict resolution. Another skill is an ability to establish concrete and realistic goals. I have observed in my year and a half as the pastor of Jesse Lee that while there are many good intentions and good ideas there is no follow-through. This skill will help me to help the congregation learn to develop S.M.A.R.T. goals that will help them move forward with their intentions and ideas.

- **Strategy:** Introduce S.M.A.R.T. Goal process to the leadership to help guide them in the process of identifying a project and how to find a solution to it. For example, Jesse Lee UMC church council used S.M.A.R.T. Goal process in how to work on the communication problem.
- **Evaluation:** Under her leadership many of the projects at the church were completed in a timely manner!

Pastor Kim is blessed with the members of Jesse Lee UMC as they are positive, strong-willed and intentional problem solvers. In leading several focus groups, Pastor Kim has demonstrated the ability to lead this group to resolve concerns, redirect when we get off topic, and adapt when the meeting doesn't go as planned.

However, there is still room for growth in helping the congregation keep on track. Especially with many difficulties in all facets of life, and with so many personalities, it is extremely challenging for her to keep the church from side tracking.

Competency 3: Professional Skills

Goal For years I have struggled with my writing skills. Despite my accomplishments I am still struggling with proficiency in my writing, which is becoming a very important skill today. As the society turns more to the internet for information and community building, I have to learn to be able to blog and use Facebook as a way to reach out to the younger people. However, my writing skills have prevented me from being able to blog and write on Facebook. The process between my thoughts and writing into words take too long for me to efficiently use blogging and Facebook. I believe by improving my writing skills I can reduce the time it take me to communicate to the people I serve and the people I hope to reach out.

- **Strategy** First purchase a book, *Writing Your Journal Article in 12 Weeks* and books on grammar and writing. Second, practice writing as I write the demonstration project.
- **Evaluation:** From earlier renditions of Christine's paper/thesis, to the final version, there is a good deal of improvement in her grammar and use of words. Certainly, since English is not her native language, there are some obvious grammar, tense and plurality errors that coincide with idiosyncrasies of her native tongue. Even these are improving however. Speed and efficiency (of writing) will come with time and years and practice. It would serve Pastor Christine well to continue journaling in English indefinitely. Her sermons are structured beautifully and so there must be some ease of her writing skills when she will speak the words...So perhaps writing more sermons or taking more opportunities for public speaking would improve this skill further.
Another recommendation will be to tape record the sermons and try to dictate them. This may help her to find some of the common mistakes she makes.
During this project there was no attempt made in expending her communication through blogs or Facebook post.

Competency 4 Vision Holder

Goal Learn to see the vision and articulate it to the congregation toward achieving this vision into reality.

- **Strategy** Working with the advisor, spiritual director, leadership of Jesse Lee and practices of spiritual disciplines to inform spiritual formation, which will help affirm the vision of the community until the vision becomes achievable goals and realities.
- **Evaluation** Through surveys and post survey meeting sessions the congregation became a part of evaluating the current state of the community (along multiple evaluation parameters). Through the post

survey meeting sessions the groups of parishioners further explored and began the development of a vision for the community.

The inclusive nature of Pastor Christine's vision evolution, not only communicates the vision, but also allows an atmosphere of "buy-in" since the parishioners are part of the creation process.

Yet, through this project Christine had accomplish the goal to move the congregation toward becoming a team. There is evidence of more team work happening at Jesse Lee UMC.

Pastor Kim (Stopka) is continuing to work with the congregation towards our next steps in goal attainment through JLUMC understanding our identity and then our purpose.

CHAPTER 9

WHAT DID I LEARN?

Beginning State of the Project.

The initial drive for the project was my passion for understanding conflict in a congregation and how I may encounter conflict in a positive way. While the parishioners may blame the pastor for not being fit or rightly called into ministry, I also saw pastors who were burned out by the conflict in the church to a point where they lost their sense of calling. I wanted to find ways to resolve this vicious cycle of abuse in the church.

When I entered Jesse Lee UMC I was unable to identify conflict. A majority of the leaders and core members of the church were eager to work together to bring growth to the church. This made it difficult to find direction of my project. As I speak to the church leadership about studying conflict within Jesse Lee UMC they were puzzled and asked, “Do you think Jesse Lee is in conflict?” I had no evidence to answer “yes.” This unfortunately, delayed me from finding focus and direction in which I could start my project. Besides the subject of conflict there were many other subjects that I could have used to do my study at Jesse Lee. My observation of many study subjects at Jesse Lee constantly distracted me from defining one subject to be studied. In addition, I did not see the connection between the decline of finance and membership with the presence of conflict. As I spoke to the core members of the church the reason for the decline in finance and membership were blamed on certain individuals, which then was followed by the comment that now that these individuals are removed from the community, finance

and membership will change too. I was still at the beginning of stage of the research and could not make the connection nor articulate it to the people clearly that this was a picture of congregation in conflict.

Much of my project, therefore, is a reflection of my learning curve in research and assessment skills. My initial observation of Jesse Lee UMC has led me to start my research from a point of conflict. However, as I gathered more information I discovered that the congregation was not ready to talk about conflict at any level. There was also no awareness of Jesse Lee's understanding as a "true community."

As I prepared for the project and tried to clarify the direction of my project Jesse Lee UMC started to experience visible conflicts. These conflicts, however, were able to be resolved without any escalation. Therefore, the congregation never acknowledged the presence of these conflicts.

For the first year of my Doctoral of Ministry program, Jesse Lee UMC was in a honeymoon state. People were too excited about the new pastor, whom they believed was the answer to their prayers. Being new to the congregation, I was still learning about the congregation and its history. Initially, I was puzzled as to why the congregation did not grow when there were so many good people who were committed to the survival of the church.

As I ended the first year and entered the second year the expected financial crisis and loss of membership did not stop. Although new people were slowly coming to the church the financial state did not change. There were events that created disturbance in a congregation that seem so peaceful and harmonious. Stories were beginning to be shared that revealed that conflicts still existed in Jesse Lee UMC regardless that the people who

were thought to have caused the problems had left the church. While I was trying to come up with a plan I was in the midst of solving problems. There was a conflict in my work as a researcher and my presence at Jesse Lee as a pastor. Jesse Lee needed their pastor more than a researcher and my role as a researcher made some people perplexed.

The greatest challenge in this project was the conflict between my identity as the pastor of Jesse Lee UMC and a student who is here to research the congregation. As a pastor, I was able to gain access into the community that a researcher would not have. However, this also meant that I had to discern what information could be shared and what information was confidential. In addition, my role as a pastor placed me in a greater responsibility to the people in whom I was doing research with. The subject of my research is not just a place and people; they were the people whom I was to care for. As my topic of research is a conflict, which deals with many sensitive matters, I had to be careful about what incidents I could report and how I reported them.

Things that did not get accomplished

Initially, I overestimated the ability of the congregation to experience spiritual formation. The covenant group is possible with time so that the group can begin to trust each other. The people who had participated in the Bible study who showed ability for covenant group were also those who participated in previous Bible studies at church. In addition, they were also members of the church choir. This proves that it is possible for Jesse Lee to experience Bible studies that can inform spiritual formation at Jesse Lee.

In reference to the Bible study and lack of participation, after the project I have noticed that many of the people who would have committed themselves to the study were already heavily involved in the other projects of the church. There were enough business matters that required urgent attention that the time they spent on these meetings made it

impossible for them to include additional time at the church. The challenge, then, is how to bring those who are not already busy with church matters; or how to make the invitation so that the people will respond?

I had written out an invitation for the Bible study with exciting words but it was not enough. I did not understand what might actually speak to the people and know how to make it more relevant to them. In the future, I will try a more creative way to introduce Bible study to the people. It may help to do a presentation during the worship service to give a better sense of the Bible study.

The 5-Minute devotional had shown great response from the people and it is something that was recommended by those who participated in the program. I plan to continue this program in the future where it will not only be emailed to the people who are interested but also be linked on the church website for anyone who visits the website to be able to access it.

While I was able to touch upon the term “conflict” during this project, I was not able to fully examine the term with the congregation. I plan to continue my study methods and theories regarding conflict. I especially hope to study the book by Furlong on the practices of conflict resolution to understand how to diagnose and analyze the conflict better but also come up with a spiritual model in relation to the Bible.

Through this project I have learned the importance of good communication. I have learned that good communication is not just about the use of words but an understanding of how the words may be understood by the people that I am communicating to. In addition, communication is also about the feelings behind the words being used. As I approached the end of the project, I realized that I was dealing

with my own conflict within. These conflicts in me were influencing the way in which I communicate to the people.

Dealing with inner conflict of my own

Many times through these last three years of being part of this program, I had many personal incidents that got in the way of focusing on the project. When the class first started I went to an orientation for the site team and there Dr. Lundy, the director of the program, had told the group that this journey we started will be tough as there will be many things that will interrupt our lives as we try to focus on the project. I have learned how wise and profound these words were for me. Every time I had an important deadline I have encountered conflict that changed my time line. There were numerous family and church emergencies that hindered me from following my plans of action. This project was a personal experiment of how spiritual formation through spiritual disciplines guided me through many discouraging incidents as I hold up a vision of finishing the project.

Through this project I had to practice much of what I was trying to accomplish with Jesse Lee. When I faced conflict, I had to turn to spiritual discipline, prayer and meditation on the scriptures as a way to inform spiritual formation that allowed me to find the peace and center in God. I have also learned much about different faces of conflict and that conflict is not just escalation of a situation but that it can also be avoidance due to the differences. Most of all, I learned about the commitment that Gorman spoke of to be a true community. This commitment required me to be patient and wait for God to direct me in how I am to respond to the person with whom I was in conflict. She has also helped me to understand new insight about the conflict; no one wants to know that he or she is the cause of the conflict. This will be another research

question, how to people respond to the revelation that they are a contributor to the conflict?

This project would not have been possible if it was not for the fact that I am the pastor who was able to gain insight through some privileged information. In both of the surveys, the response to the question about the presence of conflict in this church showed that many people in the congregation are unaware. While there are only 42 to 48 people who participated in the survey, which represents about 80% of the regular attending the worship, only 5% thought that the congregation had major conflict.¹⁰⁰

The survey data could be interpreted as no real issue with conflict in the congregation. However, my insight into the history of the church and stories told to me revealed that the congregation is indeed experiencing conflict but was in denial of the level of conflict that is present. Hence, much of my work was to find ways to bring the study to the congregation in a way that they will respond the most to help bring awareness.

Despite my effort to make this process as natural as possible for the congregation, the surveys I have conducted were not received well. When I found myself under time constraint, I had approached the leadership with an urgency of need for me to finish the project by pushing forward with the implementation of plans. There was feedback that people were offended by the way in which I had communicated.

Even from the beginning of my announcement of doing the Doctor of Ministry program there were concerns regarding my motive for being at Jesse Lee UMC. One of

¹⁰⁰ See Appendix E Survey 1. In Survey 2 (Appendix F) only 2% indicated that there was a major conflict in the church over last two years and 38% indicated that they are unaware of don't know of any conflict.

the identities of Jesse Lee that people believed is that this is a church that pastors come to promote their careers. The church has a long history of pastors who would move onto what seems to be a better career moves. One of the pastors of Jesse Lee UMC had left the church to be the executive director for the Habitat for Humanity in Bridgeport. The pastors who were at Jesse Lee from July of 2000 to June of 2011 were ex-district superintendents and a person who has a Ph. D. degree. Some people saw my work toward a doctorate and my ministry here at Jesse Lee UMC as way to fill my ambition for career advancement. This raised suspicion of me and my project.

Being aware of this suspicion and history of the church and the perception the congregation had of the pastors before me, I had to be even more cautious about the way in which I handled each process. I have used my spiritual director as a sounding board to make sure that my motives were clear with integrity for the well-being of the congregation. I have thought twice and even let go of materials that may be helpful to my project but may cause hurt to the person. I have only invited people who were willing to be openly identified to share their feedback. For other additional feedback I have used the surveys as a resource and stories with no mention of the real name or any clue that may indicate their identity.

The survey process could have been handled better for a better result. First, I did not do enough preparation work to introduce the survey to the congregation. I felt the time constraint as I had already fallen behind my schedule. Unfortunately, I had let my anxiety lead me in how the survey was conducted. I wanted to make sure I had enough people to gain data that was needed. However, with the average attendance of 50 to 60 people the data already had too small of number for full analysis. As the leadership and I

were trying to be creative and be considerate of time so that the worshippers did not stay in worship too long, we had planned to cut the sermon short and use the survey as an act of worship in reflection. This did not work as the people did not see the connection between the survey and worship. Also, the survey came with its own instruction on how to use the survey with the congregation. I lacked the skill and insight to use the survey resources for discussion as part of the focus group. I felt that the work needed to be accomplished to compete with the project I had to implement. If I had more time to understand the survey and learn to integrate the survey process with my project, I think it could have benefitted both the project and the congregation in its relevance.

I also had trouble convincing the leadership on the need for a second survey. As I tried to get the leadership on board, they were confused by the process and at points in their effort to understand they begin to instruct me on what I might need to do for the project. I was not clear about the process of the program myself as I tried to understand all the concepts that were taught through the four weeks. As I was doing the project piece by piece, I began to have better understanding of how the program worked.

The initial proposal for the project included the method of Motivational Interview. This process was not fully used in the project as the need for the project changed. I had an urgent need to understand the theory of the “healthy” church, definition of “conflict” and “community” became more relevant throughout the project.

End result of the project

As Christine L. had said in her interview, this project did help the people of Jesse Lee UMC survive through one of the most difficult conflicts in last three years, the church treasurer leaving left a large void in leadership and resources (volunteers and finance). If the congregation did not see the loss of the church treasurer as an opportunity,

this event would have led to the destruction of the congregation. The reason for this destruction would not have been due to the fact that the conflict was severe. It was because of the articulation of this future by the members the conflict aroused. This project proved that conflict is not the reason for destruction of the community but the perception that it creates in a community in facing the conflict.

Instead of letting the anxiety and panic take over, the congregation was able to find ways to transition and find volunteers and preemptively working on future finance of the church. Jesse Lee UMC leadership has recognized that there was no real education of stewardship and is working on forming a stewardship committee, who is not just about gaining pledge supports but to educate the congregation on true stewardship of church.

In addition, more people are beginning to step up and volunteer. More programs are being sought out with the intention of inviting new people into community. The leadership is seeking ways to bring more transparency to the whole congregation regarding the need to continue doing the ministry.

When a community that is in conflict reflects the situation in Bible engagement, which directs them into practice of spiritual disciplines that leads to spiritual formation, then the community is reborn into a new community.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
DEMONSTRATION PROJECT PROPOSAL

BECOMING A HEALTHY COMMUNITY BY ENGAGING BIBLE TO CHANGE
THE CULTURE OF A FAITH COMMUNITY TO EMBRACE CONFLICT

By

YANGHEE CHRISTINE STOPKA

DEMONSTRATION PROJECT PROPOSAL

New York Theological Seminary

June 2012

Challenge Statement

Jesse Lee UMC is located in Easton, CT, a community of farming and non-farming families. This quiet town is experiencing a large outward migration, which has affected the congregation, which had already been experiencing a membership and financial decline and conflict between members. As a pastor of JLUMC I will engage the members with the Bible to help encounter conflict as part of a healthy process of being a church and establishing a path to a new future.

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INTRODUCTION TO THE SETTING

THE TOWN OF EASTON, CT

When I was sent to Jesse Lee United Methodist Church to serve as their pastor, one of the first things I experienced was a response of those outside the area who knew the town or the county in which it is located. Often the people were surprised that I was moving into a place known to have become a home to the financially well to do.

The town of Easton is located in Fairfield County, Connecticut. The county has a reputation for being the richest county in the state as several of its towns were named the highest median family incomes in the country in 2008.¹ According to the Connecticut Economic Resource Center, Inc. as of 2011 the town of Easton has: a population of 7,625; 65% of the population has achieved education level of bachelor degree or higher; median household income was \$153,220; 260 of its residents commute to Manhattan, New York; and median age is 39. Its racial composition is as follows: White (6,968), Black (52); Asian Pacific (247); Native American (9); Other/Multi-Race (131); Hispanic (238).

In 1845 Easton incorporated as a town when it separated from Weston. Easton is unique in that it never had any one center for the town. Instead, little pockets of centers with one room schools grew around within the town. With the incursion of the industrial revolution, these schools eventually closed, and Samuel Staple School opened in 1930. Jesse Lee was situated in one of these centers of the town.

On Center Street, where town's volunteer fire department is located, there is one of the few stores in town, Village Store. About a mile away from the fire house is the

1 Chang, Althea, "25 Top-Earning Towns: Wondering where the wealth is? Residents of these 25 places have the highest median family incomes in the country." *CNNMoney.com* 2008, http://money.cnn.com/galleries/2008/moneymag/0807/gallery.bplive_top earners.money/mag/index.html [accessed date 1/29/2012]

town hall, police station and library. Although Easton does not have a large population, its new elementary school building is one of the largest in the state. In contrast, the middle school building is half the size of elementary school; while it shares high school is with the neighboring town of Redding. The town's school system has a reputation for being one of the best in the state, and yet many residents invest in sending their children to private schools such as Fairfield Prep in Fairfield, CT.

There are also many town residents who lived in town long before upper middle-class families began to move in, purchasing homes at a median cost of \$580,000. The town also has zoning laws requiring minimum of 1 acre of land to build a house in the lower part of Easton and minimum of 3 acres of land in the upper part of Easton.

Easton does not allow additional commercial business in town except those that are already established before the zoning law. For example, when General Electric was looking to build their corporate office in Easton, they were turned down. In the end, GE built the corporate office on the border of Fairfield and Easton, but on the Fairfield side. This resulted in a loss of opportunity to increase tax revenue. Some of the residents regret this loss, however, there is no actual action to change.

This same zoning law does not allow for any supermarket or other retail stores to be present in the town and causes many of the residents to go outside of the town to shop for their everyday needs.

Despite the inconvenience of not having any retail stores in town, Easton had experience shortage of housing due to the demand of the people who desired to move into the town. One of the members of JLUMC told me he moved out of Easton due to a job opportunity in another state. Years later they came back to Easton and tried to find a

house in town without success. As an alternative, they moved into a next town but continue their membership at JLUMC. For many years people who were willing to rent their homes benefited from this demand to live in Easton, which ended in 2011.

When I visited Easton for the first time in April of 2011, I was amazed that I could not find any “for sale” signs in the neighborhood, for there were many houses for sale in other parts of the state. Not long after I moved into the town, the “for sale” signs began to appear in the town. I then began to hear from some of the people I was meeting in town that they were forced to relocate out of Easton due to the high property taxes. While the mill rate is not as high as some other cities and towns in the state, the rising property values made the taxes high due to increase in assessment.

These occurrences made the congregation and I anxious. However, Jesse Lee Preschool, which was owned by the church, received many inquiries by families who bought these available houses and moved into the town. This was a hint that as the town population got older and moved out, young families who want the benefit of school system in Easton were moving in.

JESSE LEE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Jesse Lee United Methodist Church is a historical church with over 220 years of history. In 1789 it became a Methodist class through the work of Jesse Lee, a legendary Methodist Circuit Rider. From Methodist class it later became the first Methodist Church in New England.²

Methodism started as a movement within the Anglican Church in England by its priest, John Wesley and Charles Wesley. Because John Wesley had more influence in

² Barnes, William *Jesse Lee: Pioneer of American Methodism*, May 2, 1976.

organizing the movement, he is often given the credit as “the founder of Methodism.”

However, the historical record shows he never had any intention of starting a new denomination. Many historians believe that American Revolution played climatic role in moving American Methodism into a denomination as it severed itself from England.

At the early stage of Methodism in America, John Wesley had commissioned people who were not ordained to be a preacher. These lay preachers, known as the Circuit Riders rode horses to different towns to promote the Gospels and Methodist way of life and faith. When a Circuit Rider was able to convert a group of people, then he formed a “class” that became a Methodist church.

Jesse Lee was commissioned by Bishop Francis Asbury to promote Methodist teachings to New England where he rode his horses from Connecticut to Maine. Historians credit Jesse Lee for the growth of Methodism in New England.³ In addition, he was closely connected with government officials and served four terms as the head chaplain for the U. S. House of Representatives and one term as chaplain of the United States Senate. Ironically, his close involvement with government officials prevented him from becoming a bishop.⁴

The original church record of Jesse Lee Methodist Episcopal Church was burned during a house fire of the man who kept it, Edwin Godfrey. The current record available to the church is a reconstructed history by a long time member of the church, Nelson T. Hall and it only records until events of 1960.

3 Stevens, Abel, *Introduction of Methodism into New England* [1864] vol.2 of *History of the Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States of America*. [New York: Carlton & Porter] 1864, Book IV Chapter V. <http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyctr/books/0201-0300/stevens/0219-245.htm>

4 Barnes, William, “Jesse Lee: Pioneer of American Methodism” [Lecture at Easton Historical Society, Easton, CT, July 29, 1976] pg. 4.

In 1976 the Rev. William Barnes, former pastor of Jesse Lee, wrote an article titled "Jesse Lee: Pioneer of American Methodism." This gives more detailed accounts of how Jesse Lee came to Norwalk that led to establishment of the Methodist church in Easton. According to the article, the first church building was erected in 1795 on Park Avenue of Fairfield for worship. As the membership grew the building became too small for the members to meet and a plan to build on Flat Rock of Easton began. This plan was not approved by the whole congregation; those who did not agree with the location of the move split off and built the First Methodist Church in Bridgeport, CT. This was the first recorded instance of conflict at Jesse Lee handled conflict, but not the last.

There were small but many more incidences of conflict for this first Methodist church. In 1813 the remainder of the congregation from Park Avenue was able to build the church and finished by mid-summer of 1813 and dedication was held on September 26, 1813.⁵ Then the second incident of conflict occurred during the pastorate of Stephen Martindale in 1832 with having a Bible cushion put in the pulpit. There was an opposition to this as some felt the sanctuary must be as plain as possible. The opposition was so great that within two weeks the cushion disappeared and its contents were found outside of the church ground.⁶

There were at least two more split-offs of the church before 1960. Each split created a "class" that turned into a church. Despite all these splits, Jesse Lee Methodist church grew. According to Rev. Bill Barnes, it was the church to attend in Easton. In our conversation he also commented how sad he is to see the declining Sunday school in

⁵ Ibid. pg. 3.

⁶ Rectorection of Jesse Lee Methodist Episcopal Church in Easton by Nelson T. Hall, CT, pg. 8.

comparison to his time in Easton. He said, "There used to be over 60 Sunday school children attending church."⁷

None the less, Jesse Lee is a historical church that struggled but kept its door open. Due to the poor record keeping I am not able to gain data any further back than 2001. Thanks to the treasurer of the church, Jeff Currier, who kept the record from 2001 to 2012, I was able to do some data analysis as below:

- Until June 30, 2001 the church was served under Rev. Robert Knebel.
- From July 1, 2001 to June 30, 2004 the church was served under Rev. Don Kirkham and the average attendance went from 77 to 89.
- From July 1, 2004 to June 30, 2006 the church was served under Rev. Dennis Winkleblack and the average attendance went from 89 to 73.
- From July 1, 2006 to June 30, 2009 the church was served under Rev. Ariel Ferrari and the attendance went from 73 to 60.
- From July 1, 2009 to June 30, 2011 the church was served under Rev. George Engelhard and the attendance went from 60 to 58.
- From July 1, 2011 to present the church is served under Rev. Christine Kim and the attendance went from 58 to 61.

In relation to the decline of attendance the congregation also transition from full-time pastor to half-time pastor. Currently, there are about 30 committed members of the church dedicated to rebuilding the church back to a full-time pastor church.

In addition to the decline in worship attendance, there was a major incident in 2008 that drained much of the energy from the leadership. Jesse Lee Preschool had a

⁷ This was a quote from my informal conversation with him in year 2011.

director who was hired by the church to serve as the director for the school. She had been part of the preschool for many years and gotten raises that resulted in \$50,000 a year salary. The school made profit and was able to return \$18,000 to \$26,000 annually to the church from 2001 to 2008. However, when the enrollment decreased due to increased competition and decrease in birth rate, the preschool was no longer able to reimburse the church for its utility expenses. The church leaders started reflecting on the budget of the preschool. As a conclusion the church reviewed the director's salary and felt the church was no longer able to afford to keep the director and let go of the director. This led to litigation as well as much conflict with those who were involved in the preschool and the church. The church tried to revitalize the preschool after the conflict by hiring a new director and promoting the school. Despite the inquiry by the new families that were moving in to the town, the preschool was unable to obtain enough students for enrollment, and had to shut down at the end of the school year 2011-2012.

In the midst of all the struggles and discouragements, the members of JLUMC are the people with faith and hope as they are determine to fulfill the will of God as stated in their vision and mission statement below:

The Vision Statement of Jesse Lee United Methodist Church (JLUMC) states, *"Jesse Lee seeks to be a compassionate congregation whose members, through word and deed, live the Great Commission of Jesus Christ to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, and your neighbor as yourself."*⁸

The Mission Statement of JLUMC states, *" Our Mission is to make disciples of Jesus Christ by: INVITING into our congregation all people of the surrounding*

⁸ www.jesselee.org

communities and joyfully receiving all who respond; ENCOURAGING all people to strengthen their relationship with God; PROVIDING opportunities for all people to nurture and be nurtured through hope, healing, fellowship and Christian love; and ENCOURAGING AND SUPPORTING children, youth, and adults in their daily lives, to be faithful followers of Jesus Christ.”⁹

Yet, the people at JLUMC do not have a consensus on how they might become such a community. The author of *Reframing Organizations*, Bolman and Deal states that in an organization “Conflict is natural and inevitable” and “Change invariably creates conflict.”¹⁰

JLUMC is an organization that deals with scarcity of resources, enduring differences and interdependence while serving a community that is also going through parallel changes. There are many elements present at JLUMC for a rise of explosive conflict. By engaging the congregation of JLUCM with the Bible I plan to help them use spiritual discipline as a mean to prepare them to embrace conflict as a path toward growth and renewal.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Bolman, Lee G., and Terrence E. Deal. *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003. pgs. 197 and 376

Preliminary Analysis of the Challenge

According to Thomas Porter, “Our transformation begins with our attitude toward conflict, the way we look at conflict and respond to conflict. Our attitude frames our response to conflict and determines whether it becomes destructive or constructive.”¹¹ Therefore, the way in which a person enters conflict can deliver different results. The conflicts facing JLUMC can become constructive experiences if the people approach conflict with attitude of hope.

Richard Foster asserts that we live in a time where “superficiality is the curse of our age.”¹² He then goes on to say, “The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people.”¹³

The “deep people” are those who seek to live a life of spiritual disciplines that strengthens their relationship with God. As a result, they trust in God’s providence and their actions are opposite of the “negative attitude” as defined by Thomas Porter.¹⁴ It is a common response of people to be reactive when they encounter conflict. When in conflict, emotions drive the person to into flight/avoidance or fight/hostility.

Bolman and Deal identify sources of conflict in organization as the “combination of scarce resources and divergent interests. . .”¹⁵ The divergent interests can be separated in

11 Thomas Porter, *The Spirit and Art of Conflict Transformation: Creating a Culture Of Just Peace* (Nashville, Tenn.: Upper Room, 2010), page 11.

12 Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: the Path to Spiritual Growth*, 20th anniversary ed. (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), page 1.

13 Ibid. page 1.

14 Thomas Porter defines “negative attitude” as “defensiveness, anxiety, and fear, and to the fight-or-flight response to the perceived threat”

15 Bolman, Lee G., and Terrence E. Deal. *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003 pg. 197.

two categories: “enduring differences” – “differences of values, beliefs, information, interests, and perceptions of reality among the people who are in a connection.”

“interdependence.” – “coalitions of diverse individuals and interest groups.”¹⁶

JLUMC is a perfect example of how these elements play into their conflict.

Interdependence:

As part of United Methodist denomination, JLUMC abides by a hierarchical system. Each church under the United Methodist Discipline is part of what is called an annual conference¹⁷, which is divided by a region. There are 63 annual conferences and 50 bishops in the United States. Each conference is led by a bishop who serves a term of 4 years. Each conference is sub-divided into a region called “district.” Each “district” has a district superintendent under the administration of bishop. The Bishop and the district superintendents send a pastor to a church. Therefore, each church’s relationship with a district superintendent is very important as the local church is given little choice in choosing its pastor. The church can submit a desired profile of a pastor, but ultimately the bishop and district superintendents decide whom to send. In order for a church to receive a pastor, it has to pay a denominational fee called, an apportionment. This is based on the expenses of the church, part of which includes pastor’s compensation package. .

In addition to paying the apportionment, the church is also responsible for providing pastoral compensation package which includes: minimal salary schedule, professional reimbursement, health insurance, retirement fund, parsonage, utility for the parsonage, and any maintenance involving up keep of the parsonage. If the pastor is

16 Bolman, Lee G., and Terrence E. Deal. *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003. Pg. 186.

17 In United Methodist Church the term “annual conference” can refer a regional body, an organizational unit, and yearly meeting. Here, I am referring to a regional body.

given a half-time or less appointment, then the church is not responsible for health insurance. However, as long as the pastor is to live in the parsonage the congregation is responsible for maintaining the parsonage.

Enduring Difference and Scarcity of Resources:

In JLUMC the enduring difference and scarcity of resources are intertwined. There are enduring differences such as the building maintenance; traditional Sunday school program, fundraiser events, and preschool program are the things that the congregation is unable to support because of lack of funding and volunteers. Yet, the people at JLUMC feel that these are necessary things for the JLUMC to be a church.

The church has always relied on volunteers to function. There were many fundraisers by JLUMC that supplement the finance of the church. In 2002 fundraisers such as the tag sale and church suppers raised up to \$8,821.¹⁸ Since then many of the fundraiser events have been cancelled. In 2012 only one fundraiser was done to support the church budget. This was the annual Turkey Dinner where over 200 people attend each year. However, the amount raise is not enough to proficiently help the church budget and large amount of labor that exhaust those who volunteers.

In addition to the fundraisers to supplement income, JLUMC has had generous benefactors who often arise to the occasion and helped save the church from debt. One of the first recorded incidents took place in 1935 when the church built six classrooms on to the sanctuary. The project left the church with a debt of \$4500. JLUMC was able to

¹⁸ This was the highest amount raised from 2001 to 2012.

reduce the debt to \$2500 but found the sum difficult to pay it off. A generous benefactor, Mrs. William Disbrow, paid off the balance.

In recent years, there was a member who would help the church with large contributions for capital projects. When the church decided to borrow money to renovate part of the church, this person gave the amount as a contribution so that the church did not have to borrow money or launch a capital campaign. In addition, she has bailed out the congregation whenever there was a cash shortage. When the person passed away and the congregation had to renovate the church bell tower, this member's sister came to the rescue of the church and paid for the renovation.

Unable to gain more members to support the ministry at JLUMC, the leadership of JLUMC feels that more fundraisers are needed to raise money to support the ministry. However, not having enough people in the church where majority of the members are approach 70 or older, JLUMC is unable to plan any fundraisers. At each council meeting, finance meeting and trustee meeting there is talk of fundraisers with no actual plans to put into action.

The congregation also enjoyed multiple forms of pastoral support provided by members of the congregation. Some members recall Ken Halcott, an ordained pastor who left ministry to go into secular job to support his family. As a member of JLUMC, he provided pastoral care by visiting people and teaching Bible studies. In addition, the congregation has a lay leader, Bruce Jaffe, whose presence is equal to an assistant pastor. He fills and supports the pastors of JLUMC. However, as of 2006 his health began to deteriorate and he has been reducing his church responsibilities for his well-being. As these lay leaders were not appointed as pastors, there is no recognition that the church

lost more than full time pastor in the pastoral ministry. Instead, there is a desire for a pastor who can become their savior and help them grow in membership and in finance.

In addition, JLUMC meets in a building that is over 200 years old. For many years the church relied on the volunteers to help with maintenance of the church. There was a group in the church who did repairs. However, the group became smaller and was left with two people by 2011. While the building has many structural faults such as not enough room for storage, unstable foundation, insufficiently utilized spaces, the congregation cannot think of abandoning the building. There is a thought that part of what makes JLUMC special is the charming New England church building.

The people of JLUMC have responded to conflicts with reaction of avoidance or hostility. For example, in 2005 the pastor announced to the congregation that he had accepted a position as the bishop's assistance and would be serving three-quarter time as the pastor of the congregation. Despite the news was not received well by the congregation, the congregation followed the decision and made adjustment accordingly.

Another incident occurred with the next pastor. When the church was no longer able to afford to pay the pastor the required salary, he has decided to leave the church. The youth group, who had become attached to the pastor felt abandoned by his decision but no actions were taken to address this. Some of the members speak of this event as a reason for youth group's decline.

The next pastor appointed was sent to the church by the conference under a half-time appointment.¹⁹ He served as district superintendent and took upon the half-time

¹⁹ In United Methodist Church a pastor is sent to a church. Bishop and the cabinet, made up of district superintendents, make decision each year which pastor will be sent to what

appointment while working for the annual conference as the coordinator for stewardship. The congregation became disgruntled as they felt the message of the pastor focused too much on financial stewardship to the church in his first year. The pastor decided to retire from the serving a church after two years at JLUMC.

It is unclear what started the idea of seeking an ideal pastor for the future of their church, however, with the help of Rev. Engelhardt the congregation began a plan to help the cabinet send them the pastor they desire and that will fit. Non-religious people will say it was just a coincidence, but I as a pastor believe it was God's providence as I made myself available for a half-time appointment and I fit the description of the pastor they desired.

In addition to the conflict involving pastors in their history there was evidence of conflict among members as I was told there were cliques that used to be confrontation with each other. Even in the first year of my pastorate in the church I witnessed a conflict between two families. Both families had daughters who were similar in age. In a short time they had become close friends and their daughters were in almost every activity. Soon the girls began to have some friction and they complained directly to their parents of these incidents in their own words. As the parents begin to address the situation on their own the conflict did not go away. One of the families approached me with the situation: Then being wary of possible triangulation I began to suggest they speak to each other and then decided to set up mediation. While both parties agreed they would like to have a mediation to address the worsening situation, when we came close to setting up a

church. This process is called appointment. Most pastors ordained as an Elder are guaranteed full time appointment. However, there are some exceptions.

date the family that had first approached me withdrew from the church as well as removing their daughter from the elementary school.

There is a common theme in the way the JLUMC people approach conflict. Chris Argyris, in his article “Teaching Smart People How to Learn”, theorizes that intelligent people have difficulty learning as they have narrow definition of learning and defensive reasoning. Consequently, highly intelligent group of people in JLUMC are unable to deal conflict in positive ways.

For example, in a conversation with one of the members of the church I was told a person in a wheel chair was not able to come to church as there was no handicap-accessible bathroom. There are three bathrooms in the building and the one closest to the sanctuary is too narrow for the person to use. Two other bathrooms which were labeled “men” and “women” had single bathroom stall with dividers that made it impossible for the wheel chairs to enter. Each bathroom has one sink and one toilet, yet, due to the dividers that were installed a very large bathroom was inaccessible to those who in a wheelchairs.

Then a new pastor who came to serve the church in July of 2011, and wondered why there were dividers for a bathroom with only one stall. As she inquired with some of the members of the church and explained to them how removing the dividers will make the bathroom more accessible for those with special need, a decision was made to remove them. Once the dividers were removed they became not only handicapped-accessible but also family-friendly bathrooms for changing diapers. The person in the wheelchair never came back to the church.

Another example of this learning difficulty among the congregation is way in which they have filled their committees. While the membership decreases and less available people to serve in committees, the nomination committee is expect to fill all the committees with members. As a result, many active members were asked to take up more multiple positions in the church for many years.

For example, there are three committees in United Methodist Church structure that require to be filled through annual meeting. They are Trustee, Committee on Lay Leadership (nomination), and Staff Parish Relationship. Each of these committees is made up of three people in three classes. While the Book of Discipline, the denominational polity, does not require that all the seats for each class be filled but have minimal and maximal limits for membership of the committee, JLUMC has tried to filled these committees to the max. Hence, members of these committees were always expected to serve in the committee indefinitely and no one was ever asked by the nomination to be on the committee; they were just expected to be on the committee.

In addition, some of these same people are asked to serve as a chair of other committees a well. The council chair of the church is the worship chair as well as a member of the trustee. She also sings in the choir. This practice has led to sense of resentment and burn-out.

While there have been many conversations regarding how to draw more people into the church, the few actual attempts to involve more people have not come to any fruition. In one attempt to simply to encounter visitor to the sanctuary, the church has put on periodic concerts from September 2011 to October of 2012. There were average of about 100 people coming to these concerts and the programs had a few national names

that amazed many. However, no new people have returned to join the church since these concerts.

Chris Argyris identified six possible responses of people in conflict with an organization, which are outlined by Bolman and Deal's *Reframing Organizations*.²⁰

These responses above have been seen at JLUMC as follows:

1. Withdraw - When JLUMC received a pastor they were not happy with, some of the members left the church. When the pastor left, some of these people started to come back to the church.
2. Withdraw psychologically and passively - Some have become withdrawn psychologically and passive. For example, they would not speak out their opinions or participate in committees. These people will attend the worship, but, refuse to serve or voice their opinion on church matters.
3. Resist by restricting output - Then there are those who stop their contribution to the church. Once again, when the people became unhappy with their pastor, they started to delay or reduce their giving. This changed upon receiving a new pastor that they were happy with.
4. Climb the hierarchy to better job – This can be explained by the people who volunteer themselves for a committee that they deem powerful enough to make changes.

²⁰ Bolman, Lee G., and Terrence E. Deal. *Reframing Organizations: Artistry, Choice, and Leadership*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2003 pgs. 121-123.

5. Form alliances – There are groups of people who clump together when the church gather. These are often identified as “cliques”. They are often made up of people with similar opinions and desires for addressing a common conflict.
 6. Teaching their children to believe that work is not rewarding and hopes for advancement are slim – While many parents will plead innocent, including myself, when parents talk in front of the children regarding conflict in the church and share their disappointment, these conversations children’s attitude toward church. In addition, when the parents do not make it important part of their lives to attend worship this also becomes suggestions to children that church is not important.
- All of these are present in JLUMC in how they have responded to conflict.

Whereas not all responses are negative responses, many of these responses do not allow for the conflict to become a source for any church to become a healthy congregation with a new future.

Plan of Implementation

There are three goals to achieve in this project through engaging the Bible: (1) To bring an awareness to the people of JLUMC through defining a shared meaning of conflict and community. (2) To engage the people of JLUMC with the Bible and find methods to mediate the shared meaning of conflict. (3) To bring practices of spirituality to sustain the culture of embracing conflict as a path to enhance the health of the community and the prospect for a new future.

The first goal is to bring awareness to the people of Jesse Lee of conflict and its role in community. One of the responses that get in the way of conflict resolution is denial. Often people deny conflict and find easy scapegoat as a way to avoid or remove conflict from a community. The first goal is to define “conflict” as JLUMC understands it. This goal is to be accomplished between months of February and March of 2013.

The *first strategy* is to form a focus group that will define “conflict.” The site team will help with assembling a diverse group of people in a focus group. One of the members of the site team will help with creating a hospitable and comfortable environment to help open up the people who are participating in the focus group. I will facilitate the focus group and introduce the purpose of the group and desired result. The focus group will be asked to help define the word “conflict” and come up with a shared meaning of the word. Another site team member will assigned to be a recording secretary to keep track of the ideas and thoughts, which will develop into a unified understanding of “conflict” and “community”.

The *second strategy* is to begin to define and visualize a “healthy congregation” through seminars and workshops.

Christine Pohl makes an observation in her article for Christian Century, “Growing into the likeness of Christ and into the church as it is supposed to be cannot be separated from the messiness and disappointments that are part of human relationships. We can protect ourselves from such difficulties only by cutting ourselves off from our relationships, and that is rarely a satisfactory option.”²¹ Henceforward, the goal of the workshop will be to define “healthy congregation” and how such a congregation can come to understand and address conflict. Peter Steinke argues that the “Healthy congregations focus on the healing resources, not the disease process. Congregations can promote greater health by focusing on past resources or by developing potential new ones.”²² This workshop will bring an awareness of differences between “healthy congregations” and “unhealthy congregations”. After exploring the meaning of “healthy congregation” the participants will begin to learn to articulate how a “healthy congregation” will approach conflict.

The *third strategy* is to engage the Bible to show that conflict is a natural part of church life. In the book of Acts, chapter 10 recounts the story of Peter and Cornelius. Here is a conflict of enduring difference as Jesus’ disciples following the Jewish custom of not associating with non-Jews. This is a great example of “single-loop” thinking, which was coined by Chris Argyris. It refers to people who “define learning too narrowly

21. Pohl, Christine, “*Our Life Together: Four practices of healthy congregations*” *Christian Century* 129, no. 5 (March 7 2012): p 22-25.

22. Peter L. Steinke, “Promoting Healthy Congregations”, *Alban Weekly* (10-16-2006). <http://www.alban.org/conversation.aspx?q=printme&id=2868> [accessed November 20, 2012].

as mere “problem solving,” so they focus on identifying and correcting errors in the external environment.”²³ While the disciples were given the Great Commission in the Gospel of Matthew to spread the good news, this commission was only applied to Jews. God has used Cornelius and the dream to show Peter, the leader of the church, that the Great Commission may apply to greater diversity of people than the disciples were thinking. Here I will also engage the Bible with the approach of multiple intelligence learning. For years the churches have negated the different ways in which people learn. Through arts and other media, I will engage the focus group with the Book of Acts, chapter 10.

The second goal of the proposed project is to mediate meaning that was defined through the focus group addressing the first goal and begin to move the people of JLUMC to change the culture in order to embrace conflict in the community.

In one of the articles in Alban Weekly, “Embracing Conflict”, Lawrence Peers suggests that we connect our response to conflict with our spiritual growth,²⁴ to view conflict as an opportunity for spiritual growth. I would add to Peers’ suggestion: in order for us to understand and see the potential for spiritual growth through conflict we are also to engage in spiritual practices when we experience conflict.

Through exploration of some of the Spiritual Disciplines introduced to us by Richard Foster, the participants will begin to reframe the attitude in which they each approach conflict so that it becomes a spiritual growth experience. This goal will be addressed throughout month of April.

23 Argyris, Chris, "Teaching Smart People How to Learn" *Harvard Business Review*. 69, no. 3[1991]: 99.

24 Peers, Lawrence, “EMBRACING CONFLICT” *Alban Weekly* 2013-01-28 Number 443

The *first strategy* is to invite the people of JLUMC to a Bible Study on passages of the Bible that correspond to the definition of conflict derived in the focus group. In this Bible study the people of JLUMC will explore “the world behind the Bible”, “the world of the Bible” and “the world before the Bible.”

In “world behind the Bible”, each participant will be asked to share who they are and what life experiences bring them to relate to the Bible passage.

In world of the Bible, the participants will be given information regarding the culture, history, and relationships involved in the selected passages from the Bibles to understand the context in which it is written. For example, 1 and 2 Corinthians are the letters written by Paul to the church in Corinth to rectify the discrimination among the church members. By introducing the multi-cultural environment in which the church of Corinth existed and what were the discriminations so that the participants can now relate to the Bible. Videos and pictures of Corinth and its people may also help the participants become more engaged with the scriptures.

The world before the Bible will help the participants reflect on their own actions in similar conflict situation as those found in the Bible and identify what actions might lead to spiritual growth.

The *second strategy* is to introduce “the life of worship” to the people of JLUMC. Richard Foster tells us, “To worship is to experience Reality, to touch Life. It is to know, to feel, to experience the resurrected Christ in the midst of the gathered community. It is a breaking into the Shekinah of God, or better yet, being invaded by the Shekinah of God.”²⁵

21 Foster, Richard J., *Celebration of Discipline: the Path to Spiritual Growth*. 20th

Richard defines Shekinah as “the glory or the radiance of God dwelling in the midst of his people. It denotes the immediate Presence of God as opposed to a God who is abstract or aloof.”²⁶ Therefore each gathering of people of JLUMC, whether it be a business meeting or for fellowship, is to be understood as worship.

If JLUMC is to fulfill its vision statement of loving God with heart, soul, mind and strength, and practice loving ones neighbor, then the people must make worship the priority in their lives.²⁷ Therefore, as people gather they must strive to encounter each other with an awareness of being in the presence of God as part of changing their responses to conflict. As a way to do so, the leadership will be asked to prayer before issues and matters of conflict before a group come to a decision. Or it may be that when conflicting situations occur the leader will ask the rest of the committee to take time out to pray. During the prayer, people will invite the Holy Spirit to intervene and ask to guide the group in their decision making. This will be a part of cultural change; in order to enhance this culture of prayer and worship, I will invite the congregation each week to read a scripture on prayer with an image for reflection. This invitation can be sent through email as well as weekly bulletin.

The *third strategy* is to preach a sermon series using gathered information from the Bible study to share the information from the study with the rest of the congregation. This sermon series will also encourage the congregation to understand conflict as a part of spiritual growth.

anniversary ed. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1998 pg. 158.

26 Foster, Richard J. *Celebration of Discipline: the Path to Spiritual Growth*. 20th anniversary ed. San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 1998 pg. 158 footnote

27 Ibid. pg.159-160.

The third goal is to sustain the spiritual growth through living worship everyday rather than worship once a week: in this way the people of JLUMC will embrace conflict as a spiritual growth and a part of their life.

The *first strategy* is to introduce to the congregation Lectio Divina with the multiple intelligence method. While Lectio Divina is only focused on the reading and hearing of a text, I am going to introduce to the congregation Lectio Divina incorporated with images that are related to the Bible. Then the meditation can be expressed in multiple ways. For example, a person can draw, sing, move or even be in silence as a response to the words he or she reads and hears. Once again, through use of emails and weekly church bulletins the whole congregation will be asked to participate in the Lectio Divina.

The *second strategy* is to develop a support group modeled after the Methodist “class”. This group will be called a “covenant group.” Here the challenge is to develop a group that does not have a leader, but gather autonomous with accountability to one another. The group will meet once a week for three months. First the group will be introduced to the concept of covenant. Then they will be asked for the confidentiality of their conversation and honor system of being honest with each other. Second, part of the covenant will be to identify the conflict situation in their lives and in the church, and then talk about how it may be addressed through spiritual disciplines such as a prayer, study, fasting, worship and giving. In addition, I will consult with Dr. Andrea Weinberger on ways to incorporate “motivational interviewing” techniques into the covenant meetings. Motivational Interviewing focuses on exploring and resolving ambivalence and centers

on motivational processes within the individual that facilitate change.²⁸ The questions will be designed with the basic principles of “motivational interviewing”, which is “a collaborative, person-centered form of guiding to elicit and strengthen motivation for change.”²⁹

The *third strategy* is to schedule a workshop on conflict and spiritual growth. With the help of my advisor, I will design a workshop that will invite the congregation and others to attend. The workshop will address how we can turn the conflict in our live into a path toward experiencing God. This will be scheduled for June of 2013.

28 Miller, W. R., & Rollnick, S. *Motivational interviewing: Preparing people for change* (2nd ed.) (2002). New York: Guilford Press.

29 An introductory article from www.motivationalinterview.org. This was an introduction to the Motivational Interviewing and did not have author attached to this article.

<http://www.motivationalinterview.org/Documents/1%20A%20MI%20Definition%20Principles%20&%20Approach%20V4%20012911.pdf>

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research Question 1:

What are the current feelings, views, and experiences of conflict in the life of the church and how are they connected to the health of Jesse Lee UMC?

This research question will address the social and historical research and analysis.

According the historical record of Jesse Lee United Methodist Church contributed to development of many United Methodist Churches in the Fairfield Country, CT. When there was a conflict, it led to split-off of members. Those who left the church built another Methodist class that became a Methodist church.

In one of the clergy meetings in November 2012, a colleague shared an observation made by his colleague in town who had moved from California. As a stranger in CT, he noticed that there were three different ethos in Connecticut versus California; they are money, sexuality, and conflict. Regarding money, Californians will be eager to show their wealth and tell others how much they have. On the other hand, Connecticuturs will never admit that they have money. As for sexuality, Californians are very proud of their sexuality and will not be shied away from letting others know. However, for Connecticuturs sexuality is taboo and do not want to discuss it. It is a very private matter. Then there is the conflict, Californians will let others know what they are not happy about something while the Connecticuturs will never tell you if they are bothered by something until they cannot hold back anymore.

Research Question 2

How can the Bible become a source for helping the members of JLUMC embrace the conflict as an experience for spiritual growth?

This question addresses the biblical and theological research and analysis. There are many examples of conflict in the Bible starting from Genesis when Adam and Eve disobey God because of their doubt in God. Each human story becomes a story of conflict when each person doubts their relationship to each other and God. Conflict also arises when there are two people who are different and as long as God creates us as self-willing individuals we will always be in conflict. However, I have also learned that conflict can be an opportunity to experience the presence of God. For example, in the story of Jonah, we see this amazing grace of God to forgive the people of Nineveh. As Jonah enters into conflict with God, he learns that God does not punish him for his complaints. Instead, he continues to be in relationship with him till the end.

Research Question 3 (application demonstration)

How can Spiritual discipline nurture and sustain sense of community in the presence of conflict?

Spiritual discipline is to bring about transformation in a person and the community of faith. It brings people closer to God and increases the faith; ultimately leading us to trust in God's providences. When the enduring differences and scarcity of resources become part of a community, the first response of the people is anxiety. In anxiety people do not see the situation with clear mind. Often, our anxiety taints our perceptions. For example, in one of the congregation I had served before Jesse Lee UMC, the congregation and I had received a letter of withdrawal from a member that the congregation has supported through a difficult time. The letter made the leadership of the church quiet upset and they felt betrayed. The decision was made that the letter will not be shared with the rest of the congregation as it was requested by the person. After months later one of the leaderships re-read the letter and wondered why they had responded with so much a fear. At the time the congregation was under anxiety over loss of their beloved pastor and doubt over new pastor that they saw the letter as a letter of rejection.

It is my assumption that when the people of JLUMC can embrace the conflict with positive attitude and transformed by spiritual discipline, they will learn to embrace conflict as an experience of God's creation.

Evaluation

As a way of evaluation, I will have interviews with the focus group and have the members of Jesse Lee UMC fill out a survey before the implementation begins. This will be the marker for the way the people feel and see conflict in the life of JLUMC.

At the end of the implementation, which will be end of June or July of 2013, I will interview the same people and have another survey filled out by the members of Jesse Lee UMC.

By comparing the two interviews and surveys, I will be given information regarding the changes in attitude or behavior of the members of JLUMC towards conflict. If there is indeed a positive attitude changes, it will indicate that there was a success in the project.

In addition, it is my assumption that if this project does succeed, there will be growth in number of people attending Jesse Lee UMC. Additionally, there will be different patterns in the volunteering at Jesse Lee. I believe when people are more comfortable with encountering conflict, then they will be less hesitant to enter into volunteering with one another.

Ministerial Competency

These are the competencies that the site team felt will help me be a better minister at Jesse Lee United Methodist Church.

Competency 1 Counselor

Goal 1 Be trained in Motivational Interviewing to be a better listener. One of the important role of a pastor is to understand the people he/she serves. Even though I have been trained in listening and pastoral counseling, I have learned that I am still struggling with the need to answer before hearing the question in an attempt to solve the problem at hand. Therefore, this training will help me to be a slower to react and more attentive to listen so that I can take more time to assess the situation before I seek out solution. This is one of the most important skills in conflict resolution.

Competency 2 Administrator

Goal 2 One of the skills of an administrator is to have clarity and succinctness in defining and analyzing a task or problem. This is one of the key skills in conflict resolution. Another skill is an ability to establish concrete and realistic goals. I have observed in my year and a half as the pastor of Jesse Lee that while there are many good intentions and good ideas there is no follow through. This skill will help me to help the congregation learn to develop S.M.A.R.T. goals that will help them move forward with their intentions and ideas.

Competency 3 Professional

Goal 3 For years I have struggled with my writing skills. Despite my accomplishments I am still struggling with proficiency in my writing, which is becoming a very important skill today. As the society turns more to the internet for

information and community building, I have to learn to be able to blog and use Facebook as a way to reach out to the younger people. However, my writing skill has prevented me from being able to blog and write on Facebook. The process between my thoughts and writing into words take too long for me to efficiently use blogging and Facebook. I believe by improving my writing skill I can reduce the time it take me to communicate to the people I serve and the people I hope to reach out.

TIMELINE

Date	Task/Activity	Tools/Necessary to complete task	Person Responsible	Budgetary consideration/Cost	Source of Funding
Feb. 2013	Meet with an editor	Pool of Editors	Me	\$500	??
Feb. 2013	Proposal Approval by Director				
Feb. 2013	Meeting with the Site Team	Location: Jesse Lee UMC	Me and the Site Team members		
Feb. 2013	Meeting with Advisor	Copy of Approved Proposal	Me	Meeting via technology e.g. Skype	
Feb. 2013	Planning and Preparation time		Me		
Feb. 2013	Survey and Interviews	Papers, copiers, postage	Me and Site Team members of Jesse Lee UMC	\$200 and gas/tolls	Some of the materials will be supplied by the church
Mar. 2013	Goal 1 – Strategy 1 Focus Group	Location: Jesse Lee UMC Refreshments	Me, Site Team members of Jesse Lee UMC	\$200	Donation
Mar. 2013	Strategy 2 Workshop/Seminar	Location: Jesse Lee UMC Projector, screen	Me, projector and screen can be rented for free		
Mar. 2013	Strategy 3 Workshop/Seminar	Location: Jesse Lee UMC Projector, screen	Me, projector and screen can be rented for free		
Mar. 2013	Time for writing				
Apr. 2013	Goal 2 – Strategy 1 Bible Study	Location: Jesse Lee UMC Visual aids/ copy rights to visuals and media material		\$500	Professional Reimbursement
Apr. 2013	Strategy 2 Life of Worship		Me, Leadership		
Apr. 2013	Strategy 3 Preaching Series		Me		
Apr. 2013	Develop manuals for Cell Group Leader	Materials for cell group leader's manual	Me and Dr. Weinberger	\$300	Donation/ Church
May - July. 2013	Goal 3 – Strategy 1 Lectio Divina	Internet, Bulletin, Newsletter	Me, church secretary,		
May – July 2013	Strategy 2 Covenant Group		Me, cell group leaders		
June or July	Strategy 3 Workshop on spiritual disciplines and conflict	Advertisement, posters, speaker, place to meet.	Me, site team, and others	\$2000	????
Aug – Oct1, 2013	First Draft of the finished project		Me		

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APPENDIX B JESSE LEE UMC FINANCES

Jesse Lee United Methodist Church Statistical Review

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Income:												
Contributions from individuals	126,331	132,596	142,200	136,172	147,911	142,709	147,496	146,731	134,362	120,644	118,437	117,437
Nursery School	23,400	18,000	24,000	24,000	24,000	26,000	24,000	24,000	-	-		
Hall	3,795	3,215	3,660	4,150	4,402	3,670	4,926	2,400	3,565	4,185	4,660	4,400
Tag sale, dinners, etc.	6,878	8,821	7,588	4,885	5,313	6,783	6,636	4,815	4,023	3,898	3,620	2,852
Trustee's - Music subsidy				3,200	2,475	3,400	3,400	3,400	3,400	1,700	1,000	-
Trustee's - Added subsidy							5,000	5,000	23,300	20,000	20,000	11,200
Interest	44	50	38	21	36	40	15	3	-			
Total income	160,448	162,682	177,486	172,428	184,137	182,602	191,473	186,349	168,650	150,427	147,717	135,889
Expenses:												
Apportionments	24,521	26,043	23,899	24,935	24,615	24,140	8,701	7,502	3,822	11,906	12,156	10,778
Program	8,916	10,405	10,367	10,203	11,020	9,431	8,656	7,938	5,756	7,096	6,383	4,441
Building & grounds	33,151	26,825	35,568	36,162	46,282	59,999	60,291	60,421	62,531	53,330	58,585	55,574
Pastor's compensation	64,101	62,977	66,309	70,624	57,859	64,595	84,982	84,633	67,780	42,623	38,948	34,405
All other compensation	25,373	26,933	32,622	35,226	37,612	33,454	29,415	29,440	30,287	31,206	31,306	32,016
Total expense	156,062	153,183	168,765	177,150	177,388	191,619	192,045	189,934	170,176	146,161	147,378	137,214
Surplus (deficit) for year	4,386	9,499	8,721	(4,722)	6,749	(9,017)	(572)	(3,585)	(1,526)	4,266	339	(1,325)
Percent of apportionments paid	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	37%	26%	13%	41%	53%	100%
Average attendance	77	77	80	89	77	73	66	66	60	59	58	61
Pastor's compensation as a % of contributions from individuals	50.7%	47.5%	46.6%	51.9%	39.1%	45.3%	57.6%	57.7%	50.4%	35.3%	32.9%	29.3%

Pastors:

Rev. Robert Knebel	2001											
Rev. Donald Kirkham	2001	To		2004								
Rev. Dennis Winkleblack				2004	To	2006						
Rev. Ariel Ferrari						2006	To		2009			
Rev. George Engelhardt									2009		2011	
Rev. Christine Kim											2,011	

APPENDIX C
FOCUS GROUP/CENSUS DATA

Focus Group on “COMMUNITY”

August 21, 2013

10am

Jesse Lee United Methodist Church

Making Meaning

- Community?

Making meaning

- Biblical Community

Making Meaning

- Jesse Lee as Community

Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 11 Things I learned

1. The church refused to look like the community.

The community began a transition toward a lower socioeconomic class thirty years ago, but the church members had no desire to reach the new residents. The congregation thus became an island of middle-class members in a sea of lower-class residents.

Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 11 Things I learned

2. The church had no community-focused ministries.

This part of the autopsy may seem to be stating the obvious, but I wanted to be certain. My friend affirmed my suspicions. There was no attempt to reach the community.

Autopsy of a Deceased Church:

11 Things I learned

3. Members became more focused on memorials.

Do not hear my statement as a criticism of memorials. Indeed, I recently funded a memorial in memory of my late grandson. The memorials at the church were chairs, tables, rooms, and other places where a neat plaque could be placed. The point is that the memorials became an obsession at the church. More and more emphasis was placed on the past.

Autopsy of a Deceased Church:

11 Things I learned

4. The percentage of the budget for members' needs kept increasing.

At the church's death, the percentage was over 98 percent.

Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 11 Things I learned

5. There were no evangelistic emphases.

When a church loses its passion to reach the lost, the congregation begins to die.

Autopsy of a Deceased Church:

11 Things I learned

6. The members had more and more arguments about what *they* wanted.

As the church continued to decline toward death, the inward focus of the members turned caustic. Arguments were more frequent; business meetings became more acrimonious.

Autopsy of a Deceased Church:

11 Things I learned

7. With few exception, pastoral tenure grew shorter and shorter.

The church had seven pastors in its final ten years. The last three pastors were bi-vocational. All of the seven pastors left discouraged.

Autopsy of a Deceased Church:

11 Things I learned

8. The church rarely prayed together.

In its last eight years, the only time of corporate prayer was a three-minute period in the Sunday worship service. Prayers were always limited to members, their friends and families, and their physical needs.

Autopsy of a Deceased Church:

11 Things I learned

9. The church had no clarity as to why it existed.

There was no vision, no mission, and no purpose.

Autopsy of a Deceased Church:

11 Things I learned

10. The members idolized another era.

All of the active members were over the age of 67 the last six years of the church. And they all remembered fondly, to the point of idolatry, was the era of the 1970s. They saw their future to be returning to the past.

Autopsy of a Deceased Church:

11 Things I learned

11. The facilities continued to deteriorate.

It wasn't really a financial issue. Instead, the members failed to see the continuous deterioration of the church building. Simple stated, they no longer had "outsider eyes."

Autopsy of a Deceased Church: 11 Things I learned

As many as 100,000 churches
in America could be dying.

New Definition

What is common between definition for "community" versus "faith-community"?

Healthy Church vs. Unhealthy Church

Role Play: Small church that is . . .

- What would a healthy church look like?
- What would an unhealthy church look like?

Small Churches as Healthy Family Systems

Things to look at in order to deal with unhealthy family system in small churches:

1. The sociological unit that most resembles an extended family is a small congregation.
2. In a healthy family and a healthy small church, members know that they become more together than the sum of their parts. They are part of a story larger than themselves.
3. In a healthy family and a healthy small church, members want to get together; it is rewarding. They need to catch up.

Small Churches as Healthy Family Systems

5. In a healthy family and a healthy small church, the inflow of new energy can come from several directions, and the group will achieve new balance.
6. In a healthy family and a healthy small church, there is the ability to name and face, rather than deny, real threats.
7. In a healthy family and a healthy small church, members communicate directly with each other and their leaders. Message bearers are translators, not gossips.

Small Churches as Healthy Family Systems

8. In a healthy family and a healthy small church, the leader is a self-differentiated, non-anxious presence.
9. In a healthy family and a healthy small church, the leader stays in touch with the constituencies via “soft information” (overheard bits and pieces, ear to the ground data).
10. In a healthy family and a healthy small church, all agree that after Jesus Christ, there is no more need for scapegoats. (Isaiah 53; Hebrews 9:23-28)

Small Churches as Healthy Family Systems

11. In a healthy family and a healthy small church, members take responsibility for actions, apologize when required, and make restitution where possible.
12. In a healthy family and a healthy small church, God's deliverance is experienced in the breaking of negative family legacies and the beginning of new and positive ones. (Genesis 12:1-3; Jeremiah 31:29-34; Mark 3:31-35)
13. In a healthy family and a healthy small church, those who have "crossed over" before us are remembered and released.

Small Churches as Healthy Family Systems

14. In a healthy family and a healthy small church, members and leaders are growing in self-awareness, including awareness of the assets and liabilities of their birth order.
15. In a healthy family and a healthy small church, persons grow up and contribute or start their own stories.
16. In a healthy family and a healthy small church, there are glimpses of the future reign of God on earth.

Age	Sex	Which denomination do you feel you belong to?	How long have you been part of a faith community?	How many years have you been a member (attended) Jesse Lee
Focus Group I August 21, 2013 @ 10am				
71	male	methodist		38
70	female	methodist		25
82	female	methodist		53
69	female	methodist		42
82	male	methodist		40
57	female	methodist		8
49	female	methodist		36
avg. 68.57				
Focus Group II August 22, 2013 @ 7pm				
16	Male	Christianity in general		7 4 years, however, I am technically not a member
52	Male	Methodist	Life long	5 years
48	Male	Methodist		6
62	Male	Methodist		29
15	Male	Methodist		15
51	male	episcopalian		16
44	female	Methodist		36
45	female	Methodist		6
62	female	Methodist		22
43	female	Methodist		3
52	Male	Methodist		15
avg. 44.55				

A COMMUNITY ADDRESSES CONFLICT BY ENGAGING THE BIBLE TO
INFORM SPIRITUAL PRACTICES THAT LEAD TO SPIRITUAL FORMATION,
WHICH REGENERATES THE COMMUNITY

Vol. 2

By

YANGHEE CHRISTINE STOPKA

A DEMONSTRATION PROJECT

Submitted to
New York Theological Seminary
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF MINISTRY

New York, New York

2014

APPENDIX D
SERMONS

May 12, 2013

Scripture Reading: Acts 16:16-34

Gospel Reading: John 17:20-26

Title: Praying to be One

The gospel reading and the scripture reading both speak about prayer.

As Jesus prepares for his departure he prays for his disciples. However, we can see that this prayer is not just for the disciples but for all who became and will become believers.

In Gospel of John, Jesus prays that all believers be one. In Book of Acts, we see when we are to pray. Paul and his companions were in prison without proper process. In response to their imprisonment, they prayed and sang hymns to God. In that prayer something happened, an earthquake that shook the prison and opened up the prison door.

This is what we may call a God-given opportunity. However, there are two ways Paul and his companions can respond to this. One way is what is most logical for all of us; we leave the prison trying not to get caught. Another way is what Paul and his companion have decided to do as we are told in the readings from the Book of Acts, to stay so that the guard will not be punished for losing prisoners. Because Paul and his companions did not escape the guard who kept watch over the prison did not kill himself and became one of the believers.

Such is the power of prayer that calls us to be one with God. Even in the most despairing time as being in a prison, God gives us a way to use it to become an opportunity for saving lives.

Today is not just a Sunday of worship but a Sunday we have set aside to honor mothers in our lives. While we may be focused on how to celebrate mothers, we forget that it is a day to remember what God has intended for our mothers to be.

There is a legend in Albion, Michigan about a woman named JULIET CALHOUN BLAKELEY. In 1877 during the temperance movement the anti-temperance people took three of the young men from town and locked them in the saloon until they were intoxicated. Then released them into the market full of people. One of the young men was the Methodist pastor's son. The pastor became so disheartened he could not preach that Sunday. So Juliet C Blakeley who was seated in the front of the pew got up and called other mothers to help her conduct the service and to support the temperance movement. This was the first Mother's Day service in Albion. That day angry saloonists went to Juliet's home and tore up her wooden sidewalk in front of her house but she was able to readily identify them and the sidewalk was replaced.

Juliet's sons were so impressed with their mother they designated the second Sunday in May in honor of their mother and encouraged others to do the same.

Churches are full of stories about women of faith. Jesse Lee is one of such stories where three women became the beginning.

We honor Mother's Day for their faith to pray and stand up for their children. Today we not only are called to honor them but we are also encourage to help mothers to become such people, who pray for their children, their church and their country, and then become the people who take God given opportunity to make that prayer become reality.

Let us pray for the mothers today that we may become one in sharing love and bringing God's salvation in this world.

September 8, 2013

Here is a story of a man name Onesimus, who was a slave and ran away from his master, Philemon. Such a story was common among the culture of slavery. This story, however, has a twist. Philemon is a Christian. Onesimus becomes Christian after he ran away and meets Paul. Then, Onesimus is asked to return to his owner Philemon.

Would you be able to return to someone whom you have betrayed? We don't know all the details of why Onesimus ran away from Philemon. After all, if he is a Christian we may assume that Philemon would not have treated his slaves badly. We would assume. Yet, Onesimus ran away. This is a betrayal. Would you be able to forgive someone who betrays you? Would you be able to go back to someone you have betrayed?

This letter challenges us about the meaning of what it means to be Christian. In the Gospel of Luke chapter 14 we are told by Jesus that in order for us to become disciples of Jesus, we have to: first, give up all our relationships; second, take up the cross; third, to give up all possessions.

It makes you wonder, why would anyone want to follow Jesus?

I am not going to sugar coat these words for you. They are hard words without any room for what we often call, loop holes. When we agree to be followers of Jesus we have agreed to become his disciples. Yet, the words from the Gospel of Luke challenge us to re-think if our decision was the right one.

Paul, Philemon, and Onesimus, however, had no illusion about what it means to follow Jesus. They all knew that their decision to become Christian required nothing less.

Then, why would we want to become Christians?

We all have our reasons for coming to God. We all have meaningful reasons for coming to church. But one of the reasons many come to God is this, amazing grace.

What is this amazing grace? It is what allows Paul to believe that Philemon will forgive Onesimus and accepts him back as fellow brothers in Christ rather than his slave. It is what allows Onesimus to trust that Philemon will forgive him and returns to the master he betrayed.

The amazing grace that God offers to us is this amazing power that will restore relationships when the world tells us that there is no hope.

But such an amazing power can only be experienced when the people, who call themselves "Christians" are willing to follow the teachings of Jesus even it leads to losing everything.

Belief brings amazing things in our lives. Many of the amazing people we read about in the news are such a people. They are often the people who live their lives not measured

by the others but with belief. They believe in their own dreams and often they don't give up.

Orville and Wilbur Wright: These brothers battled depression and family illness before starting the bicycle shop that would lead them to experimenting with flight. After numerous attempts at creating flying machines, several years of hard work, and tons of failed prototypes, the brothers finally created a plane that could get airborne and stay there.

Bill Gates: Gates didn't seem like a shoe-in for success after dropping out of Harvard and starting a failed first business with Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen called Traf-O-Data. While this early idea didn't work, Gates' later work did, creating the global empire that is Microsoft.

Soichiro Honda: The billion-dollar business that is Honda began with a series of failures and fortunate turns of luck. Honda was turned down by Toyota Motor Corporation for a job after interviewing for a job as an engineer, leaving him jobless for quite some time. He started making scooters of his own at home, and spurred on by his neighbors, finally started his own business.

These people achieved great things because they did not give up on their belief that they were going to create something amazing.

There is however, difference in what God is going to offer to us that sheer human will cannot. God offers restored relationships. When two people come together in the faith that Jesus calls us, there is restoration of a person.

Paul tells us that Onesimus was once useless to both Paul and Philemon. But in God he becomes someone so useful and so meaningful that he is hesitantly returning Onesimus to Philemon. God makes those who feel useless become someone important.

One example of such a man was Abraham Lincoln. While today he is remembered as one of the greatest leaders of our nation, Lincoln's life wasn't so easy. In his youth he went to war a captain and returned a private (if you're not familiar with military ranks, just know that private is as low as it goes.) Lincoln didn't stop failing there, however. He started numerous failed business and was defeated in numerous runs he made for public office.

While Abraham Lincoln never joined any church, there are evidence that he was a deeply spiritual man and when his twelve years old son died he reported to stated:
"May God live in all. He was too good for this earth. The good Lord has called him home. I know that he is much better off in Heaven."

Amazing Grace, is what calls us today to God. It is a grace that gives us strength when we cannot find strength within us. It is a grace that gives us hope when we cannot find hope on our own.

God is calling us today. Come home. Come home to me.

Softly and Tenderly Jesus Is Calling

September 15, 2013

Scripture Reading: 1 Timothy 1:12-17

Gospel Reading: Luke 15:1-10

Title: "What I want . . . What We Want . . ."

The Gospel of Luke passage tells two parables about lost and found. These stories tell us that about our God who is willing to travel into the hole that we dug into ourselves and lift us up and out of it.

With the theology of omnipotent, all powerful God, we often see God as the one who saves. But these parables are more than just about saving. Rev. G. Penny Nixon reflects on these parables and tells us that there is difference between saving versus welcoming. Here in the parable is not just saving act of God but welcoming of those who may not deserve such.

Rev. Nixon tells us saving is about power while the welcoming is about intimacy. Saving is primarily focused on the individual, whereas welcoming is focused on the community. Here in the parable we see that God is not just interested in saving the lost but welcoming the lost into the community of God.

Another word, it is not about having power to save, but being able to take ability to save to make one feel welcome and accepted into God's kingdom.

But what does this mean? In the letter to Timothy, Paul confesses his own experience of God's mercy toward him who was a sinner. He acknowledges that only reason he is forgiven for his sinful act, killing of Christians, is due to God's mercy. As such Martin Luther also had similar experience as Paul. As Luther acknowledges that he cannot live up to the life guided in the Bible, he recognizes that the mercy of God is a gift and not something one can earn.

These words about lost and found, and forgiveness of sin could be foreign to some of us who feel that there has been no real crime in our lives. But Martin Luther, who was also lived blameless life found himself anxious when he realize that he could not live up to God's righteous standards. While we could live a life of a good person, we could never live up to God's righteous standards. For what God demands from us to be righteous goes against all of our human instincts. Yet, today these scriptures from the Gospel of Luke and 1 Timothy tell us that we do not receive the title of righteous and good because of we earn them but because we are part of God.

To be part of God means for us to understand the salvation not as saving acts but as welcoming of one another into the kingdom of God so that we can understand God fuller.

This means we are called to love one another not from my own place but through each other.

Not what I want but what we want.

We will continue to be a sinner until we understand our own repentance. The true repentance occurs only when we can see God's community only when all are included and none are "lost."

Lars and the Real Girl –

How much are we willing to welcome someone?

I have been inviting all of you to come to have conversation about who we are as Jesse Lee by using the survey we did in June. We all have our own understanding and love for Jesse Lee that draws us to this place. However, we do not have an understanding of what Jesse Lee is as our understanding. We know "what I want to see happening at Jesse Lee." But we do not know "what we want to see happening at Jesse Lee."

September 22, 2013

Scripture Reading: 1 Timothy 2:1-7

Gospel Reading: Luke 16:1-13

Title: Called to be Shrewd

Here is a gospel reading that puzzles many of us. Some of us may have real experience of meeting someone who had done exactly what this dishonest manager had done.

I had my own experience such people. My family used to own a coin-operated Laundromat. It is a business that required long hours of work where we often start the day by opening up the store at 7am and did not close the door and be at home until 11pm or later. What helped us when we did own the business was that we had very short commute to home from work. We lived in an apartment above the Laundromat. But to be open for 7 days a week and work over 15 hours a day, we needed to hire someone to help us. Unfortunately, one day we discovered that the person we hired was giving out soap that was meant to be used by us to wash customers' clothes, to his friends for free and sell scoops to make extra money. First time we found out about this, we fired the person. But as we continue to hire more people through 10 years of business, we have learned that every person we hired did this. However, to their defense, we did not pay the worker well either. We were unable to provide any benefits for these people. After all, we did not even have health insurance ourselves.

Another word, the life is not as clear cut as we would like to make it. We are learning that there are always other sides to a story of those who do not live honest. So, I want to help us to move away from being hung up on the dishonesty of the servant. Instead, I want to focus on the response of the master who found compliments the dishonest manager.

When the dishonest manager realizes that he was going to be fired from his job he began to think about what his next move should be. In order to secure his future he acts to make friends with those who owe money to his master.

So, why is Jesus telling us that this servant should be complimented?

The answer may be in verse 11, where Jesus tells the disciples, "If then you have not been faithful with the dishonest wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?" Jesus is complimenting not the dishonest act but the action by the manager to not let this devastating news halt him but proactively finding the solution to this challenge.

Jesus is challenge us, what do you do when you are faced with challenges? How are you going to address the challenges of today?

Chip and Dan Heath wrote a book called, *Decisive: How to Make Better Choices in Life and Work*. This book talks about how often smart people make wrong decision or no decision because of their inability to think beyond their own premises.

The book points out that there are four top enemies of decision making and they are:

- (1) Narrow framing
- (2) Confirmation biased
- (3) Short-term emotion
- (4) Over confidents

These are the common tendencies by common people when they are asked to make decisions in their lives such as looking for new job, getting into relationships, buying homes, etc.

Narrow-framing is when people unduly limit choices they have. Sometimes we tend to minimize what we can do because we only seek solution within what we know how to do.

Confirmation biased, which Dan Heath says is the most evil of all these four enemies, is when we only seek information that flatters our existing beliefs. Another word, we only want to hear what we want to hear.

Short-term emotion is when we allow our emotional upsets as well as some conflict in our lives to halt us or hinder us from making decision.

Over-Confidence is the tendency of people to think that we know more about the way future is going to unfold. This leads us to let the future be determined by the way we have over-confidently decided.

According to the book, too many of us let these things get in the way of making the right decision.

There is a movie that came out close to 20 years ago called Forest Gump. I want to share the trailer, which summarizes the message of the movie.

[Play the movie trailer from You Tube]

“Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you’re gonna get.”

But my second favorite line is “stupid is as stupid does.”

We often forget that life is not just about I. Q. (Intelligence Quotients). Recent psychology study has shown that success of a person can now be measure not just by the I. Q. but E. Q. (emotional quotients). This determines how one is able to identify, assess, and maneuver ones emotion and the emotions of the group to provide ways to deal with a situation. This is not something a person is born with but a person develops. It is one of the enemies of the decision making. However, I also think it is a crucial factor in how one can overcome other enemies as well. Often we let our emotion get in the way. We make decision based on our fears and anxieties or peace and security. This often does not allow us to see alternative or be patient with the process of life. When we are not comfortable we often run and try to abandon.

But God does not want us to be the people who run from our fear. The Bible full of stories of situation where the people faced their fears and anxieties with faith in God. For example, David and Goliath story is such. Here is a little boy David who decided to face

Goliath. Men who were bigger than David and more skill in fighting could not beat him. But David had faith that God will give him the skills he needed. He went to the battle field not with an armour or shield but a sling that he used to chase away wolves. How did he win the battle? He used unconventional method of fighting Goliath not hand to hand but from far with a sling to aim at Goliath's weakness.

Then there is Jacob. He went to his uncle for help and shelter. He was cheated out of marrying the girl he loves. Then he was promised stock of sheep with unfair advantage. He was only given promise to sheep with spotted sheep. They were not many. So he used his smarts to increase his sheep by interbreeding the spotted sheep with white sheep. This help increased his flock.

1 Timothy tells us to pray as the Christian community began to experience opposing pressure from the government. This prayer is not to just seat and waiting for God to bring down solution. This prayer is so that the community did not let their anxiety lead them to fear and state of freeze. Instead, this prayer is so that they can allow the peace from God to help them find solution to their challenge. They worked harder to covert more people to Christianity. As a result, in 313AD, Emperor Constantine issued an edict that Christianity will be the legal religion of Rome.

I have told you my family owned a Laundromat business. My father left the scene in our family the time when my brother and I were in college. We were left with much debt and college tuition bills. On top of it we lived in an area where gangs were in control. Some of you may have heard of Wu Tang Clan, a notorious rapping group from 1990's that often gotten into trouble. We lived in their neighborhood. My mother had video games for the customer, which often gotten occupied by the gang members who were hanging out to sell drugs. My mother a shy woman with very little knowledge of English prayed a lot during this time. She often tells me how her prayer helped her get through her fears and anxiety at night when she had to close the store by herself.

As she try to figure out how to deal with the gang members who came to hang out at her store she decided to make friends with them. So she used her courage and faith to approach them by giving them quarters to play games for free. Sometime she would give them free soap when they came to do laundry. These gang members began to appreciate my mother's gesture of friendship and started to look out for her. When a stranger came to the store and caused trouble, these gang members will take the guy outside and told them off and not to bother my mother again. They not only watch out for her but also me and my brother.

My mother made friends with the wealth she gain and this gave her the security to live in the tough neighborhood and continue her business to send both of her children to college and one to seminary.

Prayer works. God gave us intelligence. May we let our faith be the guide in finding solutions to our troubles.

September 29, 2013

Scripture Reading: 1 Timothy 6:2-10

Gospel Reading: Luke 16:19-22

Title: "Heaven and Hell? Here and now."

As we read the gospel reading it is hard not to feel uncomfortable. Or maybe perplexed by the story as to what it means for us. Is Jesus preaching against wealth?

Not quite, there are many people who were rich in the Bible. For example, King Solomon was known for his wealth as well as his wisdom. Then, what is he trying to tell us?

In this story about the rich man and Lazarus we are told the rich man goes to hell and Lazarus goes to heaven. Here we are given a description of what heaven and hell is. However, what is hell and what is heaven?

Here are some pictures of what artists consider hell. [show Power point]

Now, here are some pictures of what some artists consider heaven. [Power Point]

While we are told we will only see heaven and hell when we die. Some people are already living in hell or heaven. Probably more people live in hell than heaven. Reason being, at least one of the reason for the person to live in hell is because the person does not know the joy of life.

There was a movie that was out in 1993 called "Groundhog Day" with Bill Murray. It talks about a man name Phil who finds himself living out the same day over and over again. At first he got excited that no matter what happens on the day, he will wake up to start the day again fresh. But soon he finds himself bored and unhappy. He even tried to kill himself because he was so unhappy. It was a hell for him.

Some of us have such a life where we feel like there is nothing new and joyful in life. We have all the comfort in the world with indoor plumbing, fresh food to eat, and more than enough clothes to wear. Yet, we find ourselves feeling avoid and empty. To me, that is hell on earth. For the life lived under utter loneliness or hopeless is no better than hell.

Then what kind of life are we called to live? According to 1 Timothy chapter 6 verse 6, we are called to live a life of "godliness combined with contentment." This way of life does not guarantee worldly success.

Then again worldly success is questionable. What is it? To be world famous? Sometimes our dreams and works do not get the instant gratification like the people we know today such as Bill Gates, Mark Zuckerberg, and Jeffrey P. Bezos. In history we see that those who were successful sometimes did not get their recognition until they died such as Van Gogh. He has painted some of the most profound paintings yet he died poor. Amadeus Mozart, who was the musical genius died alone.

We often forget that the life is a marathon race and we don't know where we will be until we are at the end of our lives.

Not all of us are meant to be rich and famous like the three men I have named, but we can achieve contentment. For as long as our basic necessities are met such as not needing to experience hunger and having shelters and protection we can find contentment. Our way to contentment is simple and easy. Us we live in this country forget that there are people out there who do not have even these simple needs met.

Our contentment also can easily be taken away when we begin to think that we need more than what is needed. When we want more is when we begin to lose the sense of contentment. This is when we begin to lose the sense of peace. There is a story about an uncle who found out his nephew loves Pokemon. So he wanted to surprise him and make him happy and went on search for this toy. When he found it he was excited and thought about how happy his nephew will be. However, when he showed his nephew the toy the nephew did not express any excitement or gratitude but turns the package around and points to another toy and tells his uncle, "Now I want this one."

Our joy and happiness comes when we experience loving human touch. Even those who don't have all their basic necessities can experience joy. Here is a YouTube video that I have found that prove to us.

[Play You Tube video]

Our real joy comes when we are surrounded by the people who know the true love of God.

For our heaven is where we find people who truly care and love us. It is a place where we don't have to worry about being back stabbed and know that when we are hurt we can find comfort.

I look at my daughter Colette and I experience a greatest gift of all. When she is hurt she runs to me and all I have to do is hold her and let her know I am a safe place for her. Some people may call me foolish for the way I approach life. Yet, to my daughter I am a place of healing and comfort.

I wonder, can church be such a place? Can we be a place where people of God who desires nothing but good for those whom we worship God together? Can we be a place where there is no judgment and instead be place of trust. A place where despite my faults and imperfection, there will be unconditional love.

Isn't this what heaven is like? Can't this heaven be found here and today?

I have spoken weeks ago about the difference between church and social charity. One of the difference between the service the church provides and the service the charity provides is this, our works need to be about experiencing heaven. If what we do does not speak about heaven, which is the Kingdom of God, then our work has no power. Then we are no different than those charities.

May God help us to build such a heaven on Earth.

October 6, 2013

Scripture Reading: 2 Timothy 1:8-14

Gospel Reading: Luke 17:5-10

Title: Being Commanded to Serve

What do you think of when you hear the word “service”?

One of the most common experiences of service we all can relate to is the service we receive when we go out to eat. Even when we go to fast food places like McDonalds, we are served food. However, the quality of the service may defer depending on where we go. We do not expect to receive same quality service from McDonalds versus five starred restaurant. Also, the service is often driven by the amount of tip the person will be receiving.

We also call our worship a service. It is because we are called to come and worship God as a way to serve God. However, many of the people today come to church not to serve but to be served. People come expecting that their need to entertainment is fulfilled. I was once given an advice that a way to give good sermon is to become a good joke teller. As you have already figured out I am not a good joke teller. But this made me wonder is worship like a comedy show where people are expected to come and be entertained for their money? Then I realize that what I needed to focus on was whether I was preaching words that will help people encounter God. In addition, I discovered that in order for the people to encounter God the people also needed to be prepare to serve God when they come to worship.

Here in the Gospel of Luke 17 tells us about the disciples who wanted to experience greater faith. To this response Jesus tells them if they had true faith that is the size of mustard seed they can do great things. But what is this faith? It is a faith that comes from a humble heart of service.

The Life with God Bible defines service as “loving, thoughtful, active promotion of the good of others and the causes of God in our world, through which we experience the many title deaths of going beyond ourselves.”

In 1984 a movie called Karate Kid came out. It was international hit. In it is a young man name Daniel who is tired of being the underdog and weak. He finds a karate master Mr. Miyagi. Daniel first thought he was going to learn all sorts of amazing martial arts. But his first task was to clean windows and was floors. At first Daniel thought he was being used by Mr. Miyagi. But what he learned is that in his service of washing windows and waxing floors he had learned the basic moves of karate.

Gospel of Luke tells us that it is God’s command that we serve one another. But not just to do good work but do the service that is self-giving and actions that speaks of love and presence of God in our lives.

For it is in such services we will begin to see God clearer and experience God stronger that will lead us to faith: the faith that can overcome our fears and anxiety; the faith to

believe that our prayers will be answered. The faith to believe that we can be part of bringing Kingdom of God, or heaven as we would call it, on this earth.

October 13, 2013

Scripture Reading: 2 Timothy 2:8-15

Gospel Reading: Luke 17:11-19

Title: "Did you know you were healed?"

In 2 Timothy, we find encouragement letter from a seasoned pastor to a young pastor who is now in charge of several churches. It is unclear what the struggles of these churches are. However, the letter is written to remind them of the purpose of the church and why they can still have hope in the ministry: "If we have died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him."

But what does it mean for us to die with Jesus and live with Jesus?

For me, the die with Jesus and to live with Jesus means to know the thankfulness in the midst of life's storms.

In the Bible study on the Letter to Romans one of our first class talked about the life of thankfulness that Paul lived. In the letter to Romans Paul starts his letter with thanksgiving to God for the people of Rome. He does this as though he had known them, like a father being proud of his children. Yet, the amazing thing about this is that he never went to Rome or met these people. But in knowing their faithfulness to live out their faith in Christ, Paul finds himself thanking God for them.

Why is a thankful life so important?

In the Gospel of Luke 17 we are told of the story of 10 lepers who come seeking healing from Jesus. All ten were healed, but only one comes back to Jesus to thank him. To this, Jesus tells this leper, your faith has made you well. Some other translations will interpret this word "well" as "whole." Another word, in understanding how to live a life of thankfulness, the Samaritan man who lived a life of outcast has become a person of wholeness.

How about us? Do we turn to God when we find ourselves in front of an obstacle? If so, do we thank God that He gives us a way to address it?

Or do we turn ourselves into self-pity party and wonder where God is?

Walter and I have been on long journey of taking care of our parents. Walter had to work from the scratch to help become guardian to his parents who are no longer able to care for themselves. This journey started two years ago and we think we finally see some light at the end of the tunnel. One of the challenges with this task was that each time we tried to do what is right by his parents, we found ourselves with possible liability of losing our own financial security. One of the challenges Walter and I faced was that we had to learn to give our trust to God for our financial security. As we began to feel as though we can find some break in our lives. We found out that Colette's identity was stolen by someone. At the moment we thought, "Not another challenge!" Then we found ourselves being thankful. As we begin to talk to the expert, we found ourselves feeling like we can still manage. We can still handle this. We still had a solution.

As 2 Timothy tells us, when we surrender to God we will find that there is a life. If we learn to trust in God, we will find that we can indeed find our struggles will become a way to make us strong.

There is a song by Mandisa called “Stronger.” The words of the song tells us,
“Hey, heard you were up all night.
Thinking about how your world ain’t right
And you wonder if things will ever get better

And you’re asking why is it always raining on you
When all you want is just a little good news

Instead of standing there stuck out in the weather

Oh, don’t hang your head, it’s gonna end

God’s right there, even if it’s hard to see Him

I promise you that He still cares.

When the waves are taking you under
Hold on just a little bit longer

He knows that this is gonna make you stronger, stronger

The pain ain’t gonna last forever

And things can only get better

Believe me, this is gonna make you stronger

How about us as a Jesse Lee? Are we a community of thankful people who understand the blessings God is bringing to us?

For me, the blessing is one of the ways God let us know we are on the right path. Personally, I believe that Jesse Lee is indeed a blessed community. I know because of the things that God has already done.

Last year when the whole town of Easton was without electricity, Jesse Lee was opened to be a shelter from the cold and loneliness by becoming a warming center. Then, it became a place of warm loving meal as we ran our Turkey dinner. We were given a blessing to be a place of shelter, warmth and love for others.

Then, when the Sandy Hook shooting happened, we have become a place of hope we as we opened our doors to those who needed to be in the presence of God.

We have been for last two year a place of wonderful music for people through our concerts. It did not have to happen here, but it did.

We have restored our bell tower when others told us we could not. We have restored our foundation when we thought we could not.

We now are fixing our path in the front door so that we can be more welcoming. We are doing things here when we do not have any means. It is because God has been blessing us to let us know there is a ministry here.

But do we believe? Do we believe that God is healing us? If we do, then can we be thankful to God?

May we become a community that knows how to thank God today.

Sermon

October 20, 2013

Scripture Reading: 2 Timothy 3:14-4:5

Gospel Reading: Luke 18:1-8

Sermon Title: Pray so that we might be a church

In 2 Timothy Paul encourages Timothy to not let the discouragement stop him from believing in the works of God. He reminds him that ministry of God is done by those who were called by God according to the gifts given. When the gift of a person is nurtured by the word of God, then we begin to see the purpose God has for the person. For ministry is done not by one person but by a community of God.

During the Romans Bible study one of the participants shared with us about a recording of the rehearsal of Ravel's Bolero by Zubin Mehta. In this recording Zubin explains piece by piece of how Bolero works and importance of each instrument in making this music.

The actual rehearsal and commentaries may be little hard to hear. But there was another video, with the help of this person who introduced me to Zubin Mehta and Bolero; I have found a 3 minute video. Here we see how four men called the Stringfever Quartet can use one instrument to play this very complicated music so beautifully.

(Play the YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9eFbh-2yEbo&noembed=1>)

Just like this, the ministry of God is about the people of God coming to create a community that does the work of God.

However, we know that this community of God often finds it more difficult to do the work. We may not live in a country where our lives are threatened but we do live in a country where people are beginning to devalue faith.

When I received a call to help a family, it was because the social worker could not find any other help. Yet, when the church needs help no one seems to be willing to help. When the churches were destroyed during the flood in upstate New York two years ago, while everyone was getting help to rebuild, the churches were not given any help except from other churches.

We, the people of God are challenged to take care of ourselves. This is today's challenge for us.

In the gospel of Luke reading we are told about a widow and unjust judge. Here we are told that even an unjust judge will grant the plea of a widow when she is persistent. Following the story, Jesus asks, "Will not God grant justice to his chosen ones who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long in helping them?"

We have come together each Sunday and share prayers of the people. We have seen how the prayers have been answered by God when we come to him with faith.

Then, would God not give us what we need if we come together to do the work of God?

Yes, as long as we are about doing the work of God then God will not fail God's people. As long as we are persistent in our request, God will not ignore us.

Today we come to celebrate the Laity Sunday. It is a day to remind us that ministry is not done by a pastor. It is done by the people of God. We do not come to do the work for any one person. We come to do the work of God because once we experienced the grace of God that healed us and made us whole. And those people who are healed by God are not called to go out and heal others.

Just like the Stringfever Quartet playing the Bolero on one cello, when the people of God come together and do their diligent part in what they are called according to their gifts, we can create beautiful music called the Kingdom of God.

As Paul is near death he tells Timothy that he is a libation, which is the wine that is poured out on the sacrifice to make it burn fully. Because we are not reading the verses in between the lectionary assigned reading we don't get the fullness of what Paul is saying. And it may be that we may not like hearing what Paul is saying. For Paul tells us that he was betrayed by the people he ministered and now finds himself alone. Yet, he tells Timothy that he is not upset or resentful of this but feels fulfilled and content.

I wonder how many of us can say that, that we are content with the way we lived. One of the challenges at the end of the life is whether we can fully say we lived to the fullest. And what is it for us to live our lives to the fullest? I know of a man. He grew up in a hard time. He grew up in a time when the country just came out of war. While he was smart he could not go to college because he did not have enough money to pay for the college. Being in a world where a person without college degree could not have future, he forged his cousin's college diploma and used it to get employment. He worked hard and he became the owner of six different companies. He found himself with all the means in the world and lived a life the way he chooses and even close relations to some politically powerful people in the world. Yet, as he approached retirement he finds himself in dilemma as his two sons, his only children he had fought over who should be the heir to the family business.

Paul was a person who had it all. Then he gave it all up to live a life serving to do the work of God. Despite giving up all, he had people who he loved and cared for betraying him and abandoning him. While many of us may become bitter, Paul tells his friend Timothy he is content with his life and does not feel angry or resentful for all that he did. What a statement! While it is almost impossible for us to believe that such can happen, I believe it can happen when we trust in God and God's plan for us.

In Luke's passage we are told of a parable. This parable has been read simply as warning to be modest in our lives. Not to be too showing. However, if we go deeper in the story, we will see that it is a teaching for us about how we may lead to our own self-justification and pride because of all the good we do. When our justification does not come from anyone but God.

Someone challenged me and asked how can you say that all these kind person

APPENDIX E
SURVEY #1

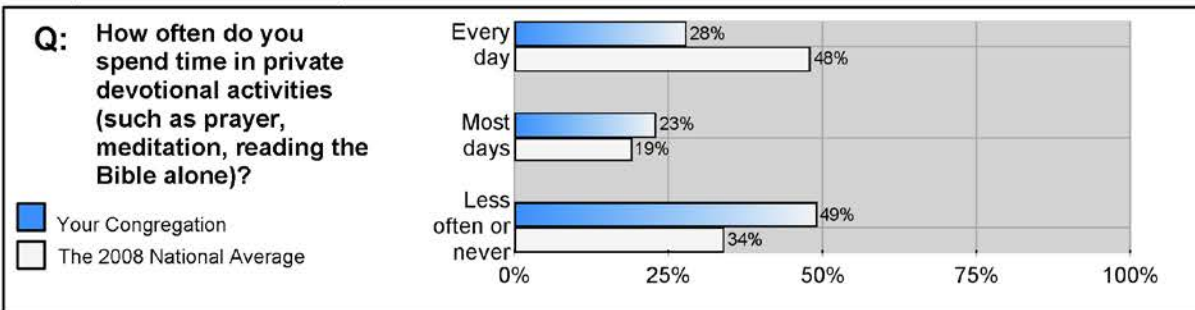


Building Spiritual Connections

Spiritual connections are made through worshipers' private devotional activities and their participation in congregational activities such as worship.

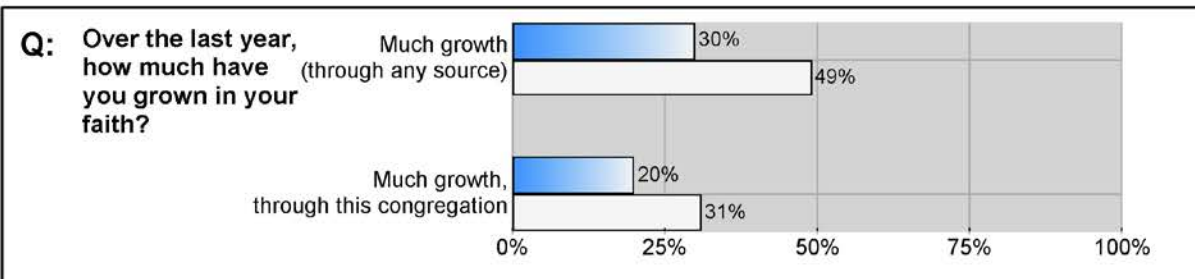
1 Private Devotions

About 28% of the people in your congregation spend time every day in private devotional activities (such as prayer, meditation, or reading the Bible alone). Your worshipers are less likely to spend time in these activities when compared to worshipers across the country (the national average is 48% who spend time every day in private devotional activities).



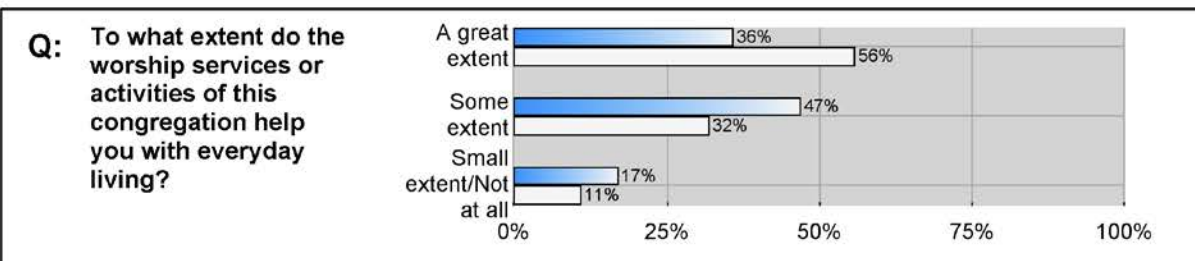
2 Growing in Faith

About half of the people in America's congregations (49%) and 30% in your congregation report they have experienced much growth in their faith over the last year, through any source. Worshipers in your congregation (20%) are less likely to say their spiritual growth comes from involvement in your congregation. Some of your worshipers reported growing in their faith through other groups (2%) or through their own activities (9%).



3 Help with Everyday Living

To what extent do the worship services or activities of your congregation help worshipers with everyday living? 36% of your worshipers reported that they are helped "to a great extent" by worship or congregational activities. This compares to the national average of 56% who report finding worship services or activities helpful with everyday living.

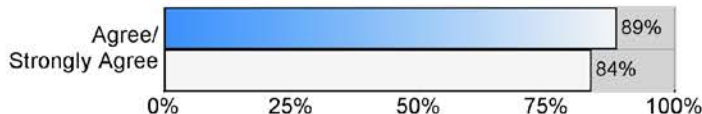




Meeting Spiritual Needs

- 4** Like the majority of worshipers in the U.S., 89% of your worshipers feel that your congregation meets their spiritual needs. Across the U.S., 84% of worshipers feel this way.

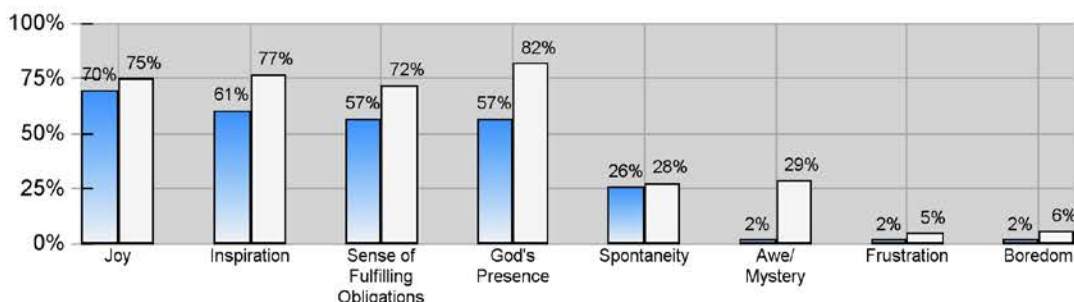
Q: My spiritual needs are being met in this congregation. (% who "agree" or "strongly agree")



Worship Experiences

- 5** Meaningful worship experiences are central for most congregations and their members. In your congregation, the largest number of worshipers "usually" or "always" experience joy during worship. Fortunately, the smallest percentage of worshipers "usually" or "always" experience boredom.

Q: How often do you experience the following during worship services at this congregation? (% who say "always" or "usually")



Making Music

- 6** Worshipers in your congregation prefer the following styles of music in congregational worship: traditional hymns (87%), classical music (30%), and contemporary hymns (19%). Across the country, worshipers reported the following preferences most often: traditional hymns (56%), praise music or choruses (31%), and contemporary hymns (26%).

Q: While you may value many different styles of music, which of the following do you prefer in worship? (Mark up to two.) Responses for your congregation:

Traditional hymns	87%	Gospel music	13%
Classical music	30%	Music from a variety of cultures	11%
Contemporary hymns	19%	Sung responsorial psalms	9%
Praise music or choruses	19%	Contemplative chants	4%
Other contemporary music or songs	17%	No music	0%

Making the Connections

Review the six spiritual connections in your congregation and consider these discovery questions for group discussion:

- * What are your congregation's strengths in nurturing the spiritual lives of those who attend here?
- * What faith connections require new wiring?
- * What can your congregation offer to meet the spiritual needs of those who are not attending worship anywhere?
- * How can your congregation build on its spiritual strengths?

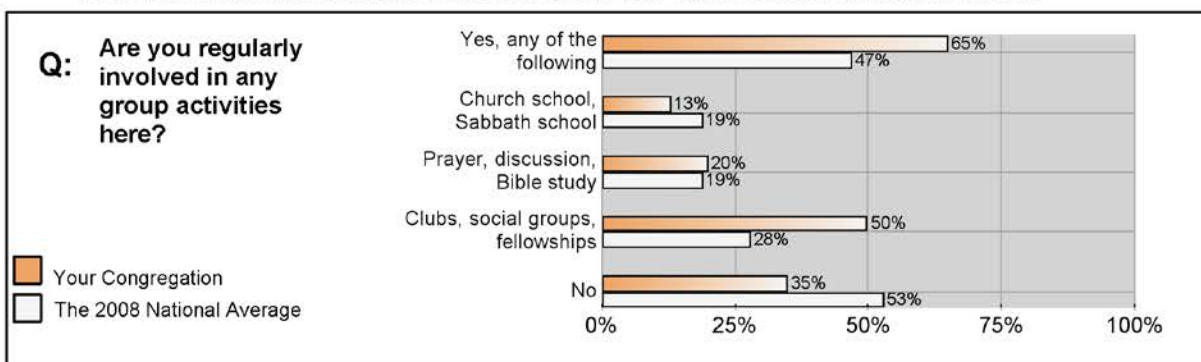


Building Inside Connections

Worshippers connect with others in the congregation through group activities (such as church school, prayer and study groups, and fellowships or clubs), serving in leadership roles, and financial support.

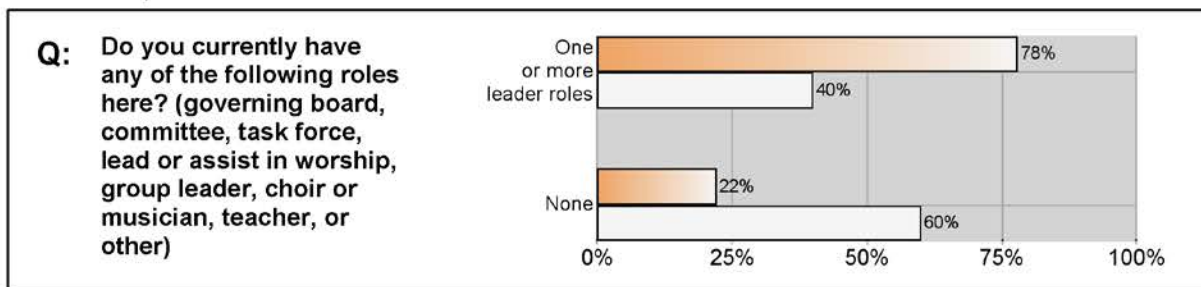
1 Involving Worshippers

How are worshippers involved in your congregation? Overall, 65% of your worshippers join in small group activities. Some take part in group activities like Sunday school, church school, or Sabbath school (13%); prayer, discussion, or Bible study groups (20%); or fellowships, clubs, or other social groups (50%). Your congregation's percentage is higher than the national average where 47% engage in some small group activity.



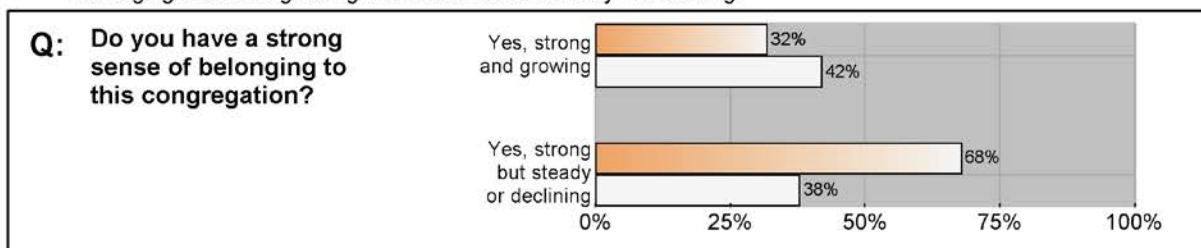
2 Involving Leaders

How many worshippers serve in leadership roles in your congregation? 78% hold at least one leadership position in your congregation (such as governing board, committee, choir or usher, church, etc.). About 40% of worshippers across the U.S. serve as leaders.



3 Belonging Here

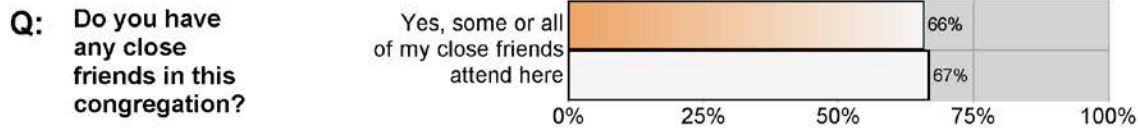
Do worshippers in your congregation feel like they belong? 100% report a strong sense of belonging to your congregation, which is greater than in the typical congregation. 32% in your congregation said this sense of belonging has been growing and 68% said it is steady or declining.





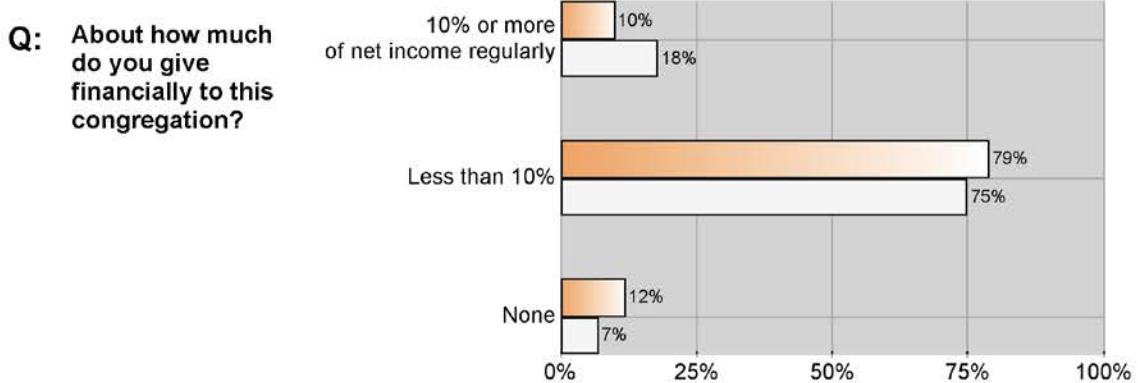
4 Making Friends

Are worshipers developing friendships with others in the congregation? About 66% of your worshipers say some or all of their close friends attend there. This is typical of the national picture where 67% of worshipers say they have some close friends in their congregation.



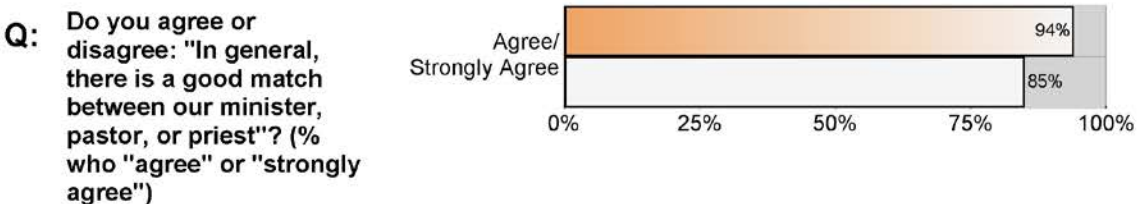
5 Giving

Financial support connects people to the congregation and its mission. In your congregation, 89% make financial contributions including 10% who regularly give 10% or more of their net income to your congregation. Nationally, 93% of worshipers make financial contributions, and 18% give 10% or more of their net income.



6 Being a Team

Do worshipers feel there is a connection between leaders and worshipers in your congregation? Nearly all worshipers in your congregation (94%) agree with the statement "In general, there is a good match between our congregation and our minister, pastor, or priest." Across all worshipers in the U.S., about 85% agree with this statement.



Making the Connections

Review the six inside connections in your congregation and consider these discovery questions for group discussion:

- *What are your congregation's strengths in this area?
- *What connections inside your walls need attention and maintenance?
- *How can your congregation build on its relationship strengths?



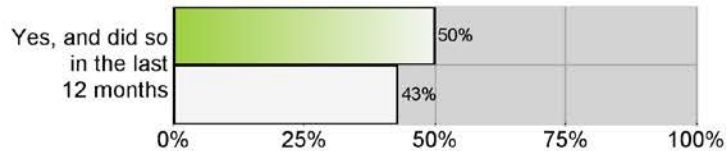
Building Outside Connections

How does your congregation connect to the community and non-members? Outside Connections consist of inviting others to attend, caring for neighbors, and welcoming new people.

1 Inviting Others

Do your worshipers invite others to attend worship services? In the past 12 months, 50% invited a friend or relative who does not attend a congregation to your worship services. This is greater than the average congregation where 43% asked someone to attend worship services.

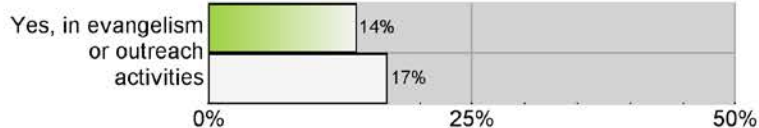
Q: Would you be prepared to invite to a worship service here any of your friends and relatives who do not now go to church?



2 Reaching Out

How many worshipers contribute to your congregation's outreach or evangelism efforts? In your congregation, 14% join in these types of activities to reach out to the wider community. This percentage is similar to the national picture where 17% report being involved in evangelism or outreach activities.

Q: Do you regularly take part in any activities of this congregation that reach out to the wider community?



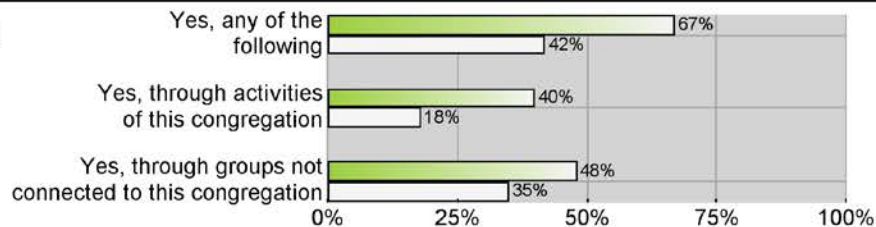
3 Your Congregation's Inviting Activities

From a list of 15 possible activities, a typical congregation reports using 6 strategies to reach out to non-members in the previous year. The most common strategies are: mailing newsletters, keeping a web site for the congregation, and encouraging members to invite new people. Your congregation listed 5 outreach strategies: mailing newsletters, keeping a web site for the congregation, holding a neighborhood activity, trying to contact people new to the area, and telephoning visitors.

4 Serving the Community

Are your worshipers involved in any community service, social justice, or advocacy activities? 67% of your worshipers take part in service or advocacy activities. Several join in community service activities organized through your congregation (40% in your congregation take part in such groups). About half of your worshipers (48%) participate in social service or advocacy groups not connected to your congregation. This is greater than the national average for all U.S. worshipers where 18% overall get involved in service or advocacy through their congregation, and 35% serve their communities through groups not connected to their congregation.

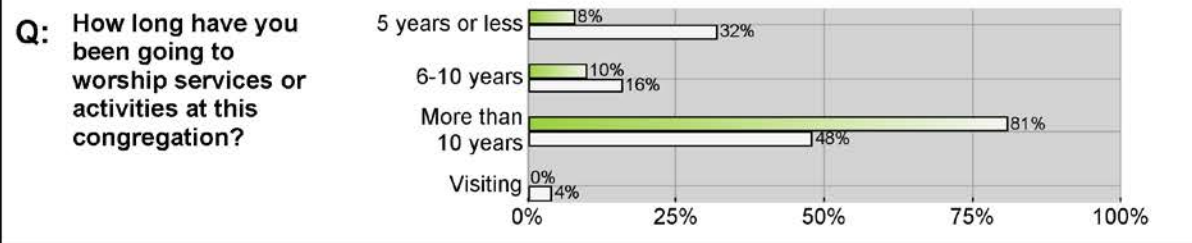
Q: Are you involved in any community service, social service, or advocacy groups?





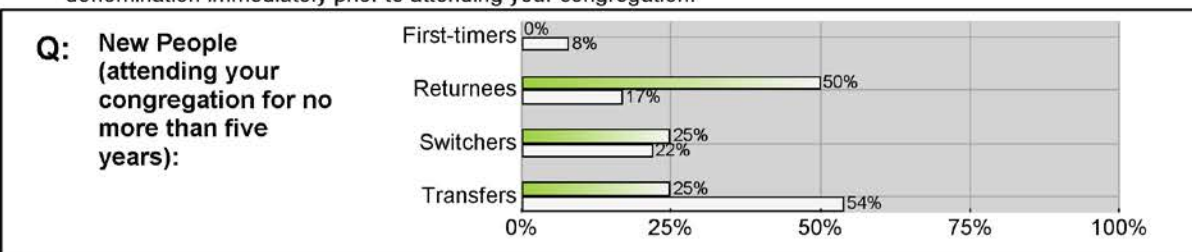
5 Welcoming New People

How many new people attend your worship services? About 8% of those attending worship services at your congregation have been coming for 5 years or less. Nationally, about 32% of all worshipers report attending 5 years or less. Visitors make up 0% of your worshipers. This compares to a national average of 4% of worshipers who are visitors.



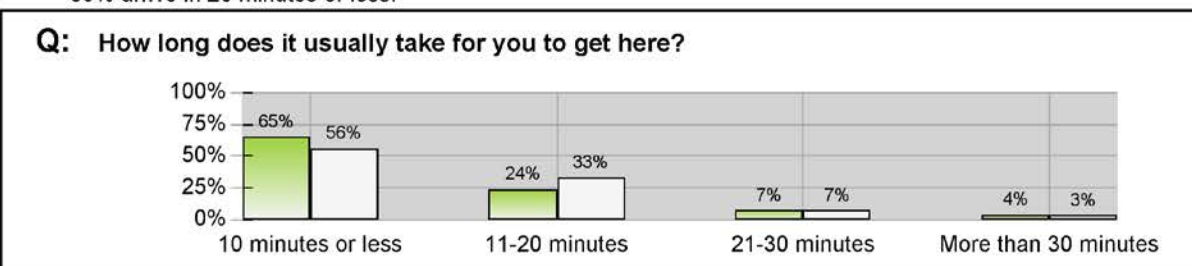
6 Knowing New People

What type of faith background is typical of the new people in your congregation? New people (those attending five years or less) come from 4 different faith backgrounds: first-timers (0% in your congregation), those who have never regularly attended anywhere; returnees (50%), those who are coming back after not attending anywhere for several years; switchers (25%), those who participated in another congregation with a different faith tradition; and transfers (25%), those who were participating in another congregation of the same denomination immediately prior to attending your congregation.



7 Getting Here

Do worshipers come from the immediate community or do they travel some time in order to attend? The largest percentage of people in your congregation take 10 minutes or less to get to the services. Nearly all of the people in your congregation (89%) travel 20 minutes or less to attend services. Across all American congregations, 89% arrive in 20 minutes or less.



Making the Connections

Review the seven connections with the people and the community outside your congregation and consider these discovery questions for group discussion:

- *What are your congregation's strengths in the areas of social care, evangelism, and advocacy?
- *Is your focus what you expected it to be?
- *Are there gaps in your community connections? What walls do you need to break down or open up?

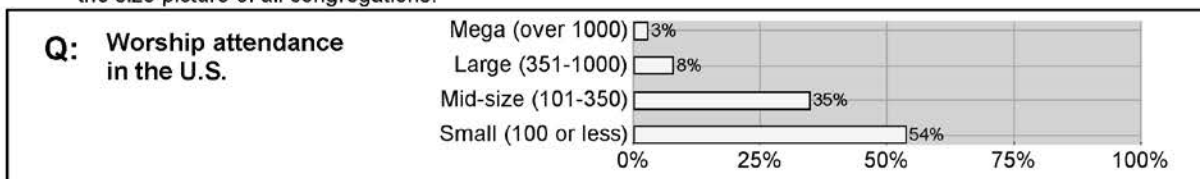


Building Identity Connections

Worshippers have an individual identity based on their age, education, and other factors. Worshipers also have a congregational identity that includes what they value and their dreams for the congregation's future.

1 Your Size

Small congregations dot the landscape, but most worshipers find themselves in large congregations. Your congregation is small with an average of 59 attendees. The chart below shows where your congregation fits in the size picture of all congregations.

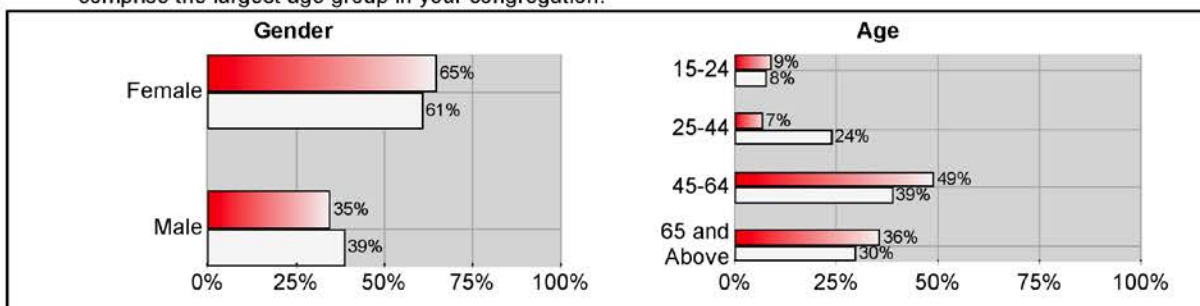


2 Your Gender Profile

Who makes up your congregation? There are fewer men (39%) than women (61%) in most congregations. Women outnumber men in your congregation (65% are women).

3 Your Age Profile

In most congregations, those aged 45-64 make up the largest group (39%). The average age of worshipers in your congregation is 62. This is older than the national average of 53. People in the age range of 45-64 comprise the largest age group in your congregation.

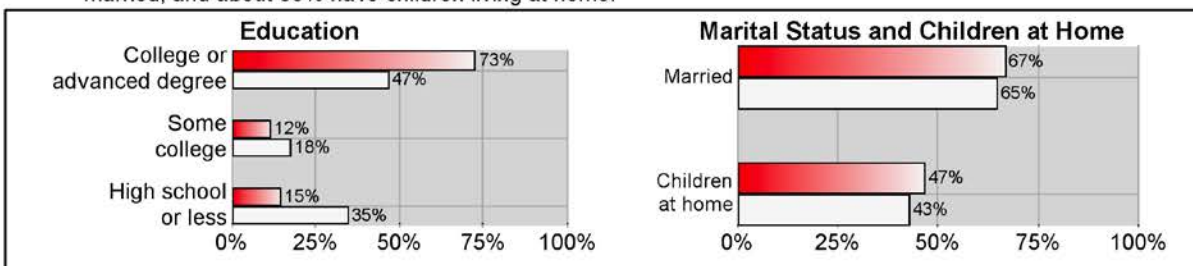


4 Your Educational Background

Worshippers in the U.S. tend to be well-educated. The U.S. Census shows that about 23% of people across the country hold at least a college degree. Among worshipers, the figure is 47%. In your congregation, 73% report a college or graduate degree.

5 Your Household Types

Most worshipers in America are married, and this is true in your congregation as well. Overall, 43% of worshipers have children living at home, less than the results for your congregation (47%). Again, worshipers differ from typical Americans. The U.S. Census indicates that only 52% of the population in this country are currently married, and about 33% have children living at home.





What You Value

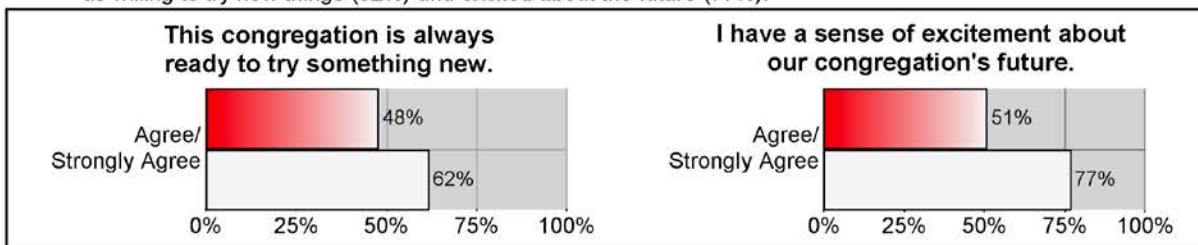
- 6** What does your congregation value? Your worshipers most value traditional worship or music; care for one another; sermons, preaching, or homilies; wider community care; and ministry for youth.

Q: Which of the following aspects of this congregation do you personally most value? (Mark up to three responses.) Responses for your congregation:

Traditional worship or music	59%	Prayer ministry	15%
Care for one another	43%	Social activities	13%
Sermons, preaching, or homilies	41%	Bible study groups	11%
Wider community care	37%	Reaching the unchurched	9%
Ministry for youth	28%	Congregation's school/pre-school	4%
Holy Communion	28%	Adult education	2%
Openness to diversity	20%	Contemporary worship or music	2%

7 Seeing Possibilities

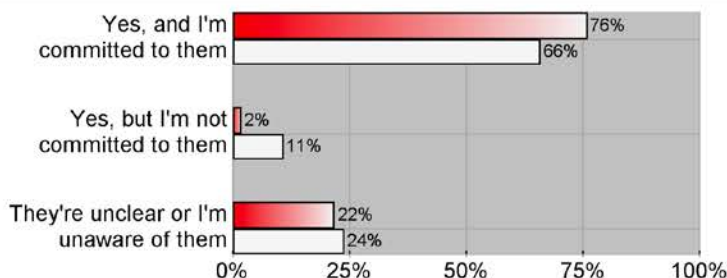
How open is your congregation to change and new directions? About half worshipers in your congregation (48%) feel the congregation is always ready to try something new. About half (51%) also express a sense of excitement about the congregation's future. Many worshipers in other congregations describe their congregation as willing to try new things (62%) and excited about the future (77%).



8 Committing to the Future

Does your congregation claim a clear vision, goals, or direction for its ministry and mission? Most worshipers in your congregation believe there is a clear vision or direction for the future (78% say yes). However, some are not sure that the vision is clear or that it exists (22%). The national average shows that most worshipers believe their congregation has a clear vision for the future (77%).

Q: Does this congregation have a clear vision, goals, or direction for its ministry and mission?



Making the Connections

Review the eight identity connections in your congregation and consider these discovery questions for group discussion:

- * Who are you as a congregation? Who can you become?
- * How do these pictures compare to how you like to think of your congregation?
- * Are you having an identity crisis?
- * How can you build on the strengths of your identity?



You and Your Congregation

1. How often do you go to worship services at this congregation?

- 0% This is my first time
- 2% Hardly ever or special occasions only
- 2% Less than once a month
- 4% Once a month
- 8% Two or three times a month
- 81% Usually every week
- 2% More than once a week

2. How long have you been going to worship services or activities at this congregation?

- 2% Less than 1 year
- 0% 1-2 years
- 6% 3-5 years
- 10% 6-10 years
- 27% 11-20 years
- 54% More than 20 years
- 0% I am visiting from another congregation
- 0% I am visiting and do not regularly go anywhere else

3. Are you currently a member of this congregation?

- 90% Yes
- 2% No, but I'm in the process of becoming a member
- 6% No, but I regularly participate here
- 2% No

4. Are you regularly involved in any group activities here? (Mark all that apply.)

- 13% Yes, in Sunday school, church school, or Sabbath school
- 20% Yes, in prayer, discussion, or Bible study groups
- 50% Yes, in fellowships, clubs, or other social groups
- 4% No, we have no group activities
- 30% No, I am not regularly involved in group activities

5. Do you regularly take part in any activities of this congregation that reach out to the wider community (visitation, evangelism, outreach, community service, social justice)? (Mark all that apply.)

- 14% Yes, in evangelism or outreach activities
- 40% Yes, in community service, social justice, or advocacy activities of this congregation
- 5% No, we don't have such activities
- 50% No, I am not regularly involved

6. Do you currently have any of the following roles here? (Mark all that apply.)

- 31% Member of the governing board
- 42% Member of a congregational committee or task force
- 9% Leading or assisting in worship
- 9% Officer or leader of men's, women's, youth, or other group
- 36% Choir member, musician, or choir director
- 7% Sunday school, church school, or Sabbath school teacher
- 16% Other role not listed here
- 22% None

7. To what extent do the worship services or activities of this congregation help you with everyday living?

- 36% A great extent
- 47% Some extent
- 15% A small extent
- 2% Not at all

About Your Faith

8. How often do you spend time in private devotional activities (such as prayer, meditation, reading the Bible alone)?

- 28% Every day or most days
- 23% A few times a week
- 2% Once a week
- 17% Occasionally
- 28% Hardly ever
- 2% Never



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EASTON, CONNECTICUT

48 total responses.
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9. Over the last year, how much have you grown in your faith? (Mark only one.)

- 26% No real growth
- 43% Some growth
- 20% Much growth, mainly through this congregation
- 2% Much growth, mainly through other groups or congregations
- 9% Much growth, mainly through my own private activities

10. Which statement comes closest to your view of the Bible? (Mark only one.)

- 0% The Bible is the word of God, to be taken literally word for word
- 30% The Bible is the word of God, to be interpreted in the light of its historical context and the Church's teachings
- 37% The Bible is the word of God, to be interpreted in the light of its historical and cultural context
- 20% The Bible is not the word of God, but contains God's word to us
- 4% The Bible is not the word of God, but is a valuable book
- 0% The Bible is an ancient book with little value today
- 9% Don't know

11. Do you agree or disagree with this statement: "All the different religions are equally good ways of helping a person find ultimate truth"?

- 17% Strongly agree
- 59% Agree
- 15% Neutral or unsure
- 9% Disagree
- 0% Strongly disagree

12. Do you agree or disagree: "My spiritual needs are being met in this congregation or parish"?

- 23% Strongly agree
- 66% Agree
- 9% Neutral or unsure
- 2% Disagree
- 0% Strongly disagree

13. Which one of the following best describes your readiness to talk to others about your faith? (Mark only one.)

- 0% I do not have faith, so the question is not applicable
- 26% I do not talk about my faith; my life and actions are sufficient
- 9% I find it hard to talk about my faith in ordinary language
- 59% I mostly feel at ease talking about my faith and do so if it comes up
- 7% I feel at ease talking about my faith and seek opportunities to do so

14. Have you ever had a conversion experience or a moment of decisive faith commitment?

- 24% Yes
- 56% No
- 20% Not sure

About Your Involvement

15. Are you involved in any community service, social service, or advocacy groups not connected to this congregation? (Mark all that apply.)

- 40% Yes, social service or charity groups
- 2% Yes, advocacy, justice, or lobbying groups
- 57% No, I'm not involved with such groups

16. Would you be prepared to invite to a worship service here any of your friends and relatives who do not now attend a congregation?

- 50% Yes, and I have done so in the past 12 months
- 26% Yes, but I have not done so in the past 12 months
- 17% No, probably not
- 0% No, definitely not
- 7% Don't know



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17. In the past 12 months, have you done any of the following? (Mark all that apply.)

- 17% Loaned money to someone outside your family
- 13% Cared for someone outside your family who was very sick
- 28% Helped someone outside your family find a job
- 61% Donated or prepared food for someone outside your family or congregation
- 87% Will vote or did vote in the 2008 presidential election
- 80% Donated money to a charitable organization (other than this congregation)
- 30% Worked with others to try to solve a community problem
- 26% Contacted an elected official about a public issue
- 26% Contributed money to a political party or candidate
- 28% Spoke at a decision-making meeting of this congregation
- 7% Went on a mission or service trip

18. How satisfied are you with what is offered here for children and youth (less than 19 years of age)?

- 11% Very satisfied
- 43% Satisfied
- 34% Mixed feelings
- 4% Dissatisfied
- 0% Very dissatisfied
- 9% Not sure or not applicable

19. Do you have any close friends in this congregation?

- 4% No, I have little contact with others from this congregation outside of activities here
- 30% No, I have some friends in this congregation, but my closest friends are not involved here
- 64% Yes, I have some close friends here as well as other close friends who are not part of this congregation
- 2% Yes, most of my closest friends are part of this congregation

20. Does this congregation have a clear vision, goals, or direction for its ministry and mission?

- 4% I am not aware of such a vision, goals, or direction
- 18% There are ideas but no clear vision, goals, or direction
- 36% Yes, and I am strongly committed to them
- 40% Yes, and I am partly committed to them
- 2% Yes, but I am not committed to them

21. Which one statement best describes your involvement in the making of important decisions in this congregation?

- 23% I have been given the opportunity and often participate in decision-making
- 44% I have been given the opportunity and occasionally get involved in decision-making
- 23% I have been given the opportunity but don't usually get involved in decision-making
- 7% I have not been given an opportunity to be involved and this is fine with me
- 2% I have not been given an opportunity to be involved and I am not happy about this

22. Do you have a strong sense of belonging to this congregation?

- 32% Yes, a strong sense of belonging that is growing
- 64% Yes, a strong sense--about the same as last year
- 4% Yes, but perhaps not as strong as in the past
- 0% No, but I am new here
- 0% No, and I wish I did by now
- 0% No, but I am happy as I am
- 0% Not applicable

23. While you may value many different styles of music, which two of the following do you prefer in congregational worship? (Mark up to two.)

- 87% Traditional hymns
- 19% Praise music or choruses
- 19% Contemporary hymns
- 17% Other contemporary music or songs (not hymns)
- 9% Sung responsorial psalms
- 30% Classical music or chorales
- 4% Contemplative chants (Taizé, Iona)
- 11% Music or songs from a variety of cultures
- 13% Gospel music
- 0% No music or songs
- 4% Don't know



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24. Do you agree or disagree: "In general, there is a good match between our congregation and our minister, pastor, priest, or rabbi"?

- 53% Strongly agree
- 40% Agree
- 6% Neutral or unsure
- 0% Disagree
- 0% Strongly disagree
- 0% There is currently no leader here

25. Which of the following aspects of this congregation do you personally most value? (Mark up to three.)

- 37% Wider community care or social justice emphasis
- 9% Reaching those who do not attend church
- 59% Traditional style of worship or music
- 2% Contemporary style of worship or music
- 28% Sharing in Holy Communion, Eucharist, or the Lord's Supper
- 13% Social activities or meeting new people
- 41% Sermons, preaching, or homilies
- 11% Bible study or prayer groups, other discussion groups
- 28% Ministry for children or youth
- 15% Prayer ministry for one another
- 43% Practical care for one another in times of need
- 4% The congregation's school or pre-school
- 20% Openness to social diversity
- 2% Adult church-school or Sabbath-school classes

26. Before you started coming to this congregation, were you participating in another congregation?

- 17% No, I've come here for most or all of my life
- 22% No, before coming here I had not been attending any congregation for several years
- 9% No, before coming here I had never regularly attended
- 52% Yes, immediately prior to coming here, I was participating in another congregation

27. Before you started coming here, what type of congregation did you attend? (Mark only one.)

- 0% Assembly of God
- 2% Baptist
- 21% Catholic
- 10% Episcopal
- 2% Lutheran
- 36% Methodist
- 0% Nazarene
- 2% Non-denominational
- 0% Pentecostal
- 5% Presbyterian
- 0% Seventh-day Adventist
- 5% United Church of Christ
- 5% Other
- 12% I did not attend another congregation before coming here

About You

28. Age of worshippers:

- 9% 15-24
- 7% 25-44
- 49% 45-64
- 36% 65 and above

29. Gender of worshippers:

- 65% Female
- 35% Male

30. What is your employment status? (Mark all that apply.)

- 36% Employed or self-employed full-time
- 20% Employed or self-employed part-time
- 4% Unemployed
- 29% Retired
- 7% Full-time homemaker
- 7% Student
- 2% Other



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31. What is the highest educational level you have completed? (reported for worshipers age 25 and older)

- 0% No formal schooling
- 2% Primary school through 8th grade (K-8)
- 0% Some high school
- 12% Completed high school
- 5% Trade certificate
- 7% Associate degree
- 44% Bachelor's degree from a university or college
- 29% Master's, Doctorate, or other graduate degree

32. What is your present marital status?

- 11% Never married
- 58% In first marriage
- 9% Remarried after divorce
- 0% Remarried after death of spouse
- 0% Living in a committed relationship
- 2% Separated
- 11% Divorced
- 9% Widowed

33. Do you have a spouse or partner who is also completing a survey here?

- 37% Yes
- 63% No

34. What is your race or origin? (Mark all that apply.)

- 2% Asian or Pacific Islander
- 0% Black or African American
- 0% Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin
- 0% Indian (American) or Alaska Native
- 98% White or Caucasian
- 0% Some other race

35. Where were you born?

- 96% In the United States
- 4% In another English-speaking country
- 0% In a non-English-speaking country

36. Where were your parents born?

- 80% Both born in the United States
- 4% Only father born in the United States
- 7% Only mother born in the United States
- 9% Both father and mother born in another country

37. Where did you live when you were 5 years old?

- 96% In the United States
- 4% In another country

38. When you were 5 years old, was English your primary language?

- 100% Yes
- 0% No

39. Which statement best describes the people who currently live in your household?

- 13% I live alone
- 24% A couple without children
- 4% One adult with child/children
- 42% Two or more adults with child/children
- 16% Some adults living in the same household

40. Most often reported ZIP codes of worshipers:

- 56% 6612
- 12% 6611
- 9% 6468
- 7% 6825
- 5% 6614
- 2% 45429
- 2% 6484
- 2% 6606
- 2% 6824
- 2% 824

41. About how much do you give financially to this congregation?

- 10% I give 10% or more of net income regularly
- 26% I give about 5% to 9% of net income regularly
- 48% I give less than 5% of net income regularly
- 5% I give a small amount whenever I am here
- 12% I do not contribute financially here



US Congregational Life Survey

JESSE LEE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
EASTON, CONNECTICUT

48 total responses.
ID Number: V686

42. Which of the following describes your total annual household income before taxes?

- 0% Less than \$10,000
- 15% \$10,000 to \$24,999
- 13% \$25,000 to \$49,999
- 10% \$50,000 to \$74,999
- 15% \$75,000 to \$99,999
- 15% \$100,000 to \$124,999
- 0% \$125,000 to \$149,999
- 31% \$150,000 or more

43. Respondents with at least one household member: (adjusted for multiple responses per household)

- 7% Less than 6 years old
- 14% 6 to 12 years old
- 21% 13 to 18 years old
- 34% 19 to 24 years old
- 100% 25 years old or older

44. Respondents with at least one household member participating here: (adjusted for multiple responses per household)

- 7% Less than 6 years old
- 15% 6 to 12 years old
- 19% 13 to 18 years old
- 15% 19 to 24 years old
- 96% 25 years old or older

45. How many children of any age do you have, whether they live at home or elsewhere? (adjusted for multiple responses per household)

- 28% None
- 15% One
- 35% Two
- 15% Three
- 0% Four or more

46. How many of your children of any age live at home with you? (adjusted for multiple responses per household)

- 58% None
- 18% One
- 20% Two
- 2% Three
- 2% Four or more

Some Final Questions

47. How long does it usually take you to get here?

- 33% 1-5 minutes
- 33% 6-10 minutes
- 17% 11-15 minutes
- 7% 16-20 minutes
- 7% 21-30 minutes
- 4% More than 30 minutes

48. Compared to 2 years ago, do you think you participate in activities of the congregation more, less, or about the same amount as you did then?

- 27% Participate more
- 49% About the same participation
- 24% Participate less
- 0% Not applicable (been coming less than 2 years)

49. Have this congregation's leaders encouraged you to find and use your gifts and skills here?

- 31% Yes, to a great extent
- 44% Yes, to some extent
- 13% Yes, to a small extent
- 2% Not at all
- 9% Don't know

50. How often do you experience the following during worship services at this congregation? (Always or Usually)

- 57% A sense of God's presence
- 61% Inspiration
- 2% Boredom
- 2% Awe or mystery
- 70% Joy
- 2% Frustration
- 26% Spontaneity
- 57% A sense of fulfilling my obligation

51. Do you agree or disagree: "Only followers of Jesus Christ can be saved"?

- 5% Strongly agree
- 7% Agree
- 25% Neutral or unsure
- 25% Disagree
- 39% Strongly disagree

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For questions with multiple responses possible, percentages usually total well over 100. On other questions, totals may not equal 100 due to rounding.



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48 total responses.
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52. Do you agree or disagree: "I have a sense of excitement about our congregation's future"?

- 11% Strongly agree
- 40% Agree
- 40% Neutral or unsure
- 4% Disagree
- 4% Strongly disagree

53. Over the last two years, has there been any conflict in this congregation? (Mark only one.)

- 36% No conflict that I am aware of
- 55% Some minor conflict
- 0% Major conflict
- 5% Major conflict, with leaders or people leaving
- 5% Don't know

54. Of the following, which one best describes your opinion of the future directions of this congregation?

- 4% We need to get back to the way we did things in the past
- 9% We are faithfully maintaining past directions
- 29% We are currently deciding on new directions
- 22% We are currently moving in new directions
- 11% We need to rethink where we are heading
- 11% Our future is very unclear or doubtful
- 13% Don't know

55. Do you agree or disagree: "This congregation is always ready to try something new"?

- 5% Strongly agree
- 43% Agree
- 32% Neutral or unsure
- 20% Disagree
- 0% Strongly disagree

56. To what extent does the minister, pastor, or priest here take into account the ideas of those who worship here?

- 57% A great extent
- 34% Some extent
- 2% A small extent
- 0% Not at all
- 7% Don't know
- 0% There is currently no leader here

57. Which of the following is the best description of the style of leadership of your pastor, minister, or priest?

- 16% Leadership that tends to take charge
- 41% Leadership that inspires people to take action
- 34% Leadership that acts on goals that people here have been involved in setting
- 0% Leadership where the people start most things
- 0% There is currently no leader here
- 9% Don't know

58. Do you agree or disagree: "God is directly involved in worldly affairs"?

- 9% Strongly agree
- 38% Agree
- 31% Neutral or unsure
- 13% Disagree
- 9% Strongly disagree
- 0% I don't believe in God

59. Do you agree or disagree: "God is angered by human sin"?

- 7% Strongly agree
- 16% Agree
- 41% Neutral or unsure
- 20% Disagree
- 16% Strongly disagree
- 0% I don't believe in God

60. Which of the following terms best describes your current stand on theological issues?

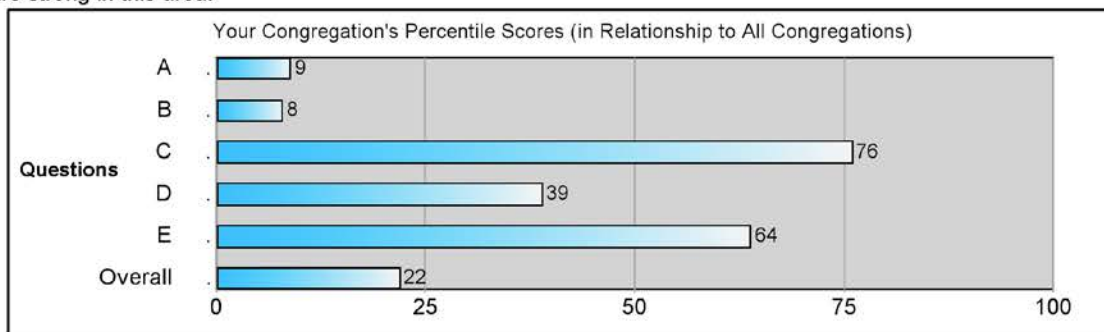
- 0% Very conservative
- 22% Conservative
- 33% Right in the middle
- 24% Liberal
- 20% Very liberal

**Strength 1**
Growing Spiritually**Spiritual Connections**

Are your worshipers Growing Spiritually? The chart below displays the five questions that make up this strength and the percentage of worshipers giving each answer. The last line shows your congregation's overall or average score—your congregation's overall score is 37%. You can also see how your scores compare to other congregations of similar size and faith group.

	Growing Spiritually Questions: Percentage of Worshipers Who...	Your Congregation	2008 Average: congregations with less than 100 in worship	2008 Average for all United Methodist Churches
A	Are growing in their faith through participation in activities of their congregation	20%	37%	38%
B	Spend time at least a few times a week in private devotional activities	51%	72%	73%
C	Feel their spiritual needs are being met in their congregation	89%	83%	85%
D	Report Bible study and prayer groups as one of the three most valued aspects of their congregation	11%	16%	19%
E	Report the prayer ministry of the congregation as one of the three most valued aspects of their congregation	15%	17%	16%
	Overall Growing Spiritually Scores:	37%	45%	46%

The box below shows where your congregation's percentile scores on each question fit in the national picture of all congregations. Your congregation has an overall score that puts it in the 22nd percentile. This means 78% of all congregations scored higher than yours on Growing Spiritually. Congregations in the 80th percentile or above are strong in this area.

**What We Know about Congregations Where Most Worshipers Are Growing Spiritually**

Congregations and parishes in the top 20%, that is in the 80th percentile or above (where Growing Spiritually is high), also tend to be doing well in other areas. Their worshipers are more likely to:

- * have a strong sense of belonging to the congregation (Strength 4)
- * experience meaningful worship in the congregation (Strength 2)
- * have begun attending the congregation in the last five years (Strength 8)



Strength 2

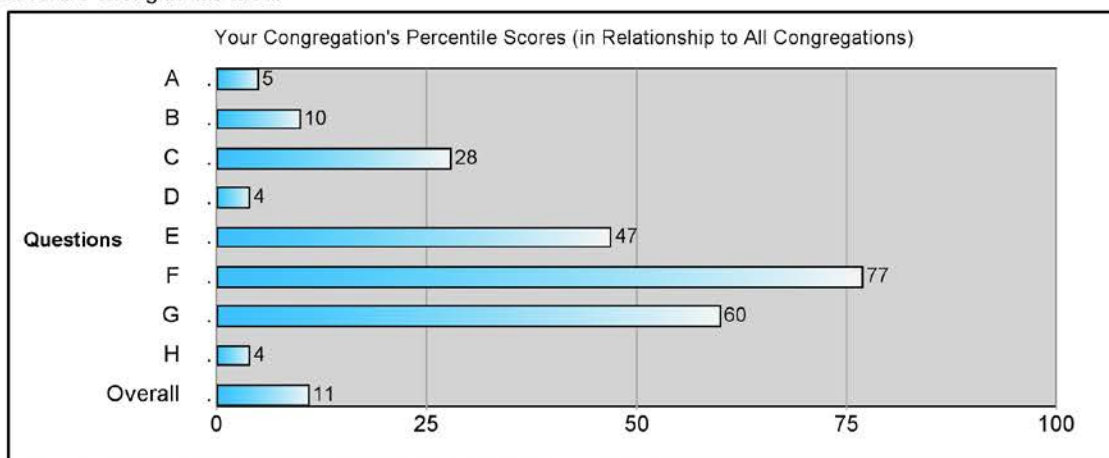
Meaningful Worship

Spiritual Connections

Do your worshipers experience Meaningful Worship? The chart below displays the eight questions that make up this strength and the percentage of worshipers giving each answer. The last line shows your congregation's overall or average score—your congregation's overall score is 51%. You can also see how your scores compare to other congregations of similar size and faith group.

	Meaningful Worship Questions: Percentage of Worshipers Who...	Your Congregation	2008 Average: congregations with less than 100 in worship	2008 Average for all United Methodist Churches
A	Experience God's presence during worship always or usually	57%	77%	81%
B	Experience inspiration during worship always or usually	61%	77%	77%
C	Experience joy during worship always or usually	70%	77%	78%
D	Experience awe during worship always or usually	2%	21%	25%
E	Experience boredom during worship rarely	64%	68%	65%
F	Experience frustration during worship rarely	75%	66%	66%
G	Report the sermons, preaching, or homilies as one of the three most valued aspects of their congregations	41%	37%	35%
H	Report worship services and other congregational activities help them to a great extent with everyday life	36%	63%	65%
	Overall Meaningful Worship Scores:	51%	61%	62%

The box below shows where your congregation's percentile scores on each question fit in the national picture of all congregations. Your congregation has an overall score that puts it in the 11th percentile. This means 89% of all congregations scored higher than yours on Meaningful Worship. Congregations in the 80th percentile or above are strong in this area.



What We Know about Congregations with Meaningful Worship

Congregations and parishes in the top 20%, that is in the 80th percentile or above (where Meaningful Worship is high), also tend to be doing well in other areas. Their worshipers are more likely to:

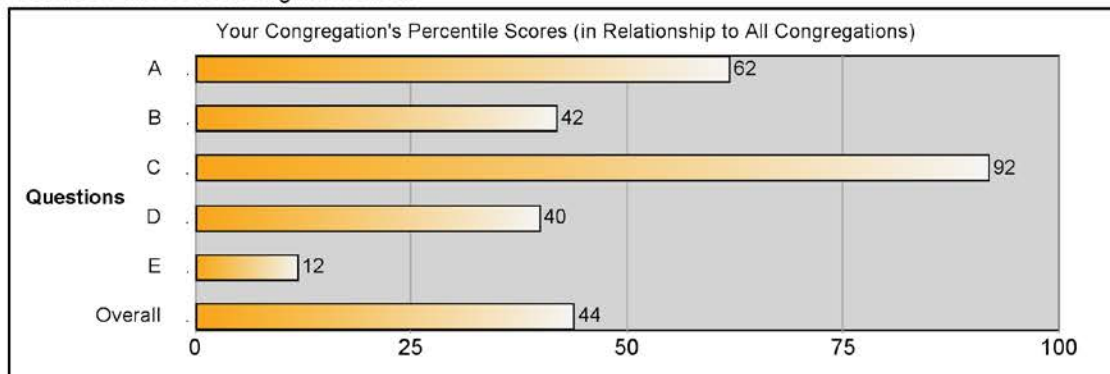
- * have empowering congregational leaders (Strength 9)
- * be growing spiritually (Strength 1)
- * participate in congregational activities (Strength 3)

**Strength 3****Participating in the Congregation****Inside Connections**

Are your worshipers Participating in the Congregation? The chart below displays the five questions that make up this strength and the percentage of worshipers giving each answer. The last line shows your congregation's overall or average score—your congregation's overall score is 57%. You can also see how your scores compare to other congregations of similar size and faith group.

	Participating in the Congregation Questions: Percentage of Worshipers Who...	Your Congregation	2008 Average: congregations with less than 100 in worship	2008 Average for all United Methodist Churches
A	Attend worship services usually every week or more than once a week	83%	80%	80%
B	Are involved in one or more small groups (e.g., Sunday school, prayer, or Bible study, discussion groups)	65%	71%	68%
C	Have one or more leadership roles in the congregation (e.g., board member, teacher, leading worship)	78%	65%	65%
D	Often participate in important decision making in the congregation	23%	34%	31%
E	Regularly give 5% or more of their net income to the congregation (not including school tuition)	36%	59%	62%
	Overall Participating in the Congregation Scores:	57%	62%	61%

The box below shows where your congregation's percentile scores on each question fit in the national picture of all congregations. Your congregation has an overall score that puts it in the 44th percentile. This means 56% of all congregations scored higher than yours on Participating in the Congregation. Congregations in the 80th percentile or above are strong in this area.

**What We Know about Congregations Where Most Worshipers Are Participating in the Congregation**

Congregations and parishes in the top 20%, that is in the 80th percentile or above (where Participating in the Congregation is high), also tend to be doing well in other areas. Their worshipers are more likely to:

- * be growing spiritually (Strength 1)
- * be inviting others to worship and talking about their faith (Strength 7)
- * share a strong vision for the congregation's future (Strength 10)
- * have begun attending the congregation in the last five years (Strength 8)
- * be caring for children and youth participating in the congregation (Strength 5)



Strength **4**

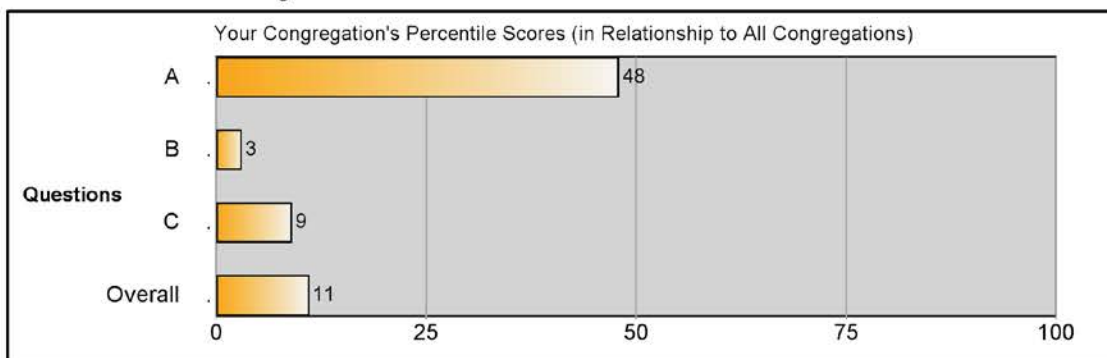
Having a Sense of Belonging

Inside Connections

Do your worshipers Have a Sense of Belonging? The chart below displays the three questions that make up this strength and the percentage of worshipers giving each answer. The last line shows your congregation's overall or average score—your congregation's overall score is 20%. You can also see how your scores compare to other congregations of similar size and faith group.

	Having a Sense of Belonging Questions: Percentage of Worshipers Who...	Your Congregation	2008 Average: congregations with less than 100 in worship	2008 Average for all United Methodist Churches
A	Report they are participating in the activities of the congregation more than they did two years ago	27%	27%	31%
B	Say most of their closest friends are part of this congregation	2%	13%	16%
C	Feel their sense of belonging to this congregation is strong and growing	32%	51%	52%
	Overall Sense of Belonging Scores:	20%	30%	33%

The box below shows where your congregation's percentile scores on each question fit in the national picture of all congregations. Your congregation has an overall score that puts it in the 11th percentile. This means 89% of all congregations scored higher than yours on Having a Sense of Belonging. Congregations in the 80th percentile or above are strong in this area.



What We Know about Congregations with a Strong Sense of Belonging

Congregations and parishes in the top 20%, that is in the 80th percentile or above (where Having a Sense of Belonging is high), also tend to be doing well in other areas. Their worshipers are more likely to:

- * be growing spiritually (Strength 1)
- * share a strong vision for the congregation's future (Strength 10)
- * have begun attending the congregation in the last five years (Strength 8)



Strength **5**

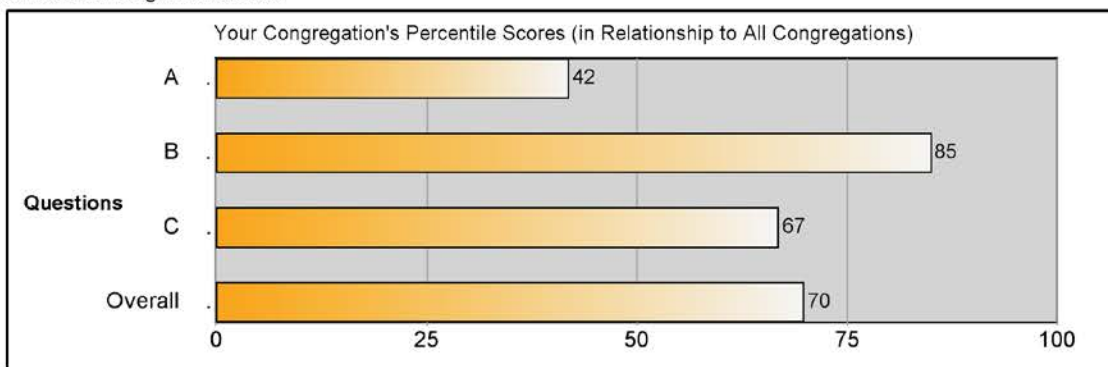
Caring for Young People

Inside Connections

Does your congregation Care for Young People? The chart below displays the three questions that make up this strength and the percentage of worshipers giving each answer. The last line shows your congregation's overall or average score—your congregation's overall score is 58%. You can also see how your scores compare to other congregations of similar size and faith group.

	Caring for Young People Questions: Percentage of Worshipers...	Your Congregation	2008 Average: congregations with less than 100 in worship	2008 Average for all United Methodist Churches
A	Who are satisfied with what is offered by the congregation for children and youth (under 19 years of age)	53%	52%	55%
B	Who report ministry for children or youth as one of the three most valued aspects of their congregation	28%	17%	18%
C	Whose children and youth (living at home) also worship here	94%	85%	84%
	Overall Caring for Young People Scores:	58%	51%	52%

The box below shows where your congregation's percentile scores on each question fit in the national picture of all congregations. Your congregation has an overall score that puts it in the 70th percentile. This means 30% of all congregations scored higher than yours on Caring for Young People. Congregations in the 80th percentile or above are strong in this area.



What We Know about Congregations That Are Caring for Young People

Congregations and parishes in the top 20%, that is in the 80th percentile or above (where Caring for Young People is high), also tend to be doing well in other areas. Their worshipers are more likely to:

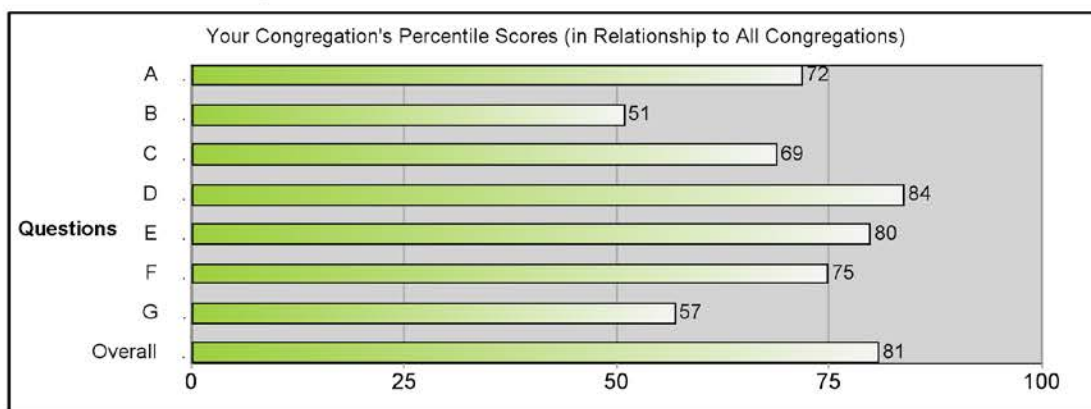
- * share a strong vision for the congregation's future (Strength 10)

**Strength 6****Focusing on the Community****Outside Connections**

Does your congregation Focus on the Community? The chart below displays the seven questions that make up this strength and the percentage of worshipers giving each answer. The last line shows your congregation's overall or average score—your congregation's overall score is 48%. You can also see how your scores compare to other congregations of similar size and faith group.

	Focusing on the Community Questions: Percentage of Worshipers Who...	Your Congregation	2008 Average: congregations with less than 100 in worship	2008 Average for all United Methodist Churches
A	Are involved in social service or advocacy groups through the congregation	40%	36%	37%
B	Are involved in social service or advocacy groups in their community	43%	44%	43%
C	Contribute to charitable organizations other than their congregation	80%	74%	74%
D	Report wider community care or social justice emphasis as one of the three most valued aspects of their congregation	37%	19%	15%
E	Report openness to social diversity as one of the three most valued aspects of their congregation	20%	14%	7%
F	Worked with others in the last year to try to solve a community problem	30%	25%	22%
G	Voted or will vote in the 2008 presidential election	87%	84%	81%
	Overall Focusing on the Community Scores:	48%	42%	40%

The box below shows where your congregation's percentile scores on each question fit in the national picture of all congregations. Your congregation has an overall score that puts it in the 81st percentile. This means 19% of all congregations scored higher than yours on Focusing on the Community. Congregations in the 80th percentile or above are strong in this area.

**What We Know about Congregations That Are Focusing on the Community**

Congregations and parishes in the top 20%, that is in the 80th percentile or above (where Focusing on the Community is high), also tend to be doing well in other areas. Their worshipers are more likely to:

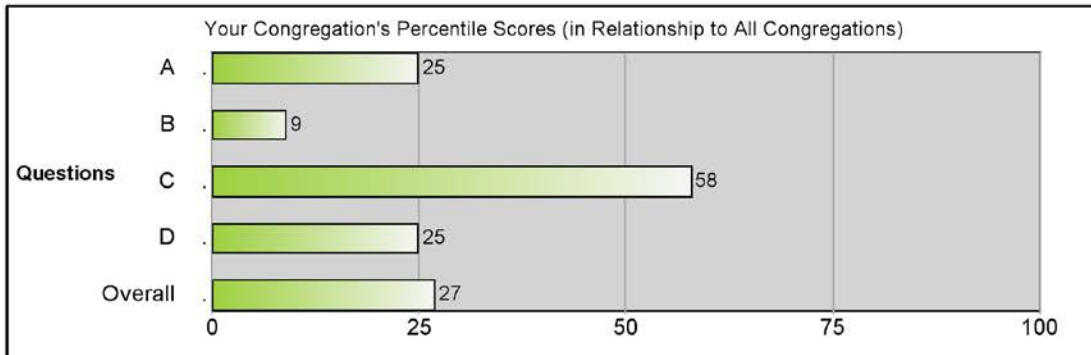
- * have empowering congregational leaders (Strength 9)
- * have a strong sense of belonging to the congregation (Strength 4)
- * share a strong vision for the congregation's future (Strength 10)

**Strength 7**
Sharing Faith**Outside Connections**

Are your worshipers Sharing Their Faith? The chart below displays the four questions that make up this strength and the percentage of worshipers giving each answer. The last line shows your congregation's overall or average score—your congregation's overall score is 20%. You can also see how your scores compare to other congregations of similar size and faith group.

	Sharing Faith Questions: Percentage of Worshipers Who...	Your Congregation	2008 Average: congregations with less than 100 in worship	2008 Average for all United Methodist Churches
A	Are involved in outreach or evangelistic activities in their congregation	14%	26%	26%
B	Feel at ease talking about their faith and seek opportunities to do so	7%	21%	20%
C	Have invited to a worship service in the past year a friend or relative who does not currently attend anywhere	50%	53%	54%
D	Report reaching those who do not attend as one of the three most valued aspects of their congregation	9%	20%	21%
	Overall Sharing Faith Scores:	20%	30%	30%

The box below shows where your congregation's percentile scores on each question fit in the national picture of all congregations. Your congregation has an overall score that puts it in the 27th percentile. This means 73% of all congregations scored higher than yours on Sharing Faith. Congregations in the 80th percentile or above are strong in this area.

**What We Know about Congregations Strong in Sharing Faith**

Congregations and parishes in the top 20%, that is in the 80th percentile or above (where Sharing Faith is high), also tend to be doing well in other areas. Their worshipers are more likely to:

- * participate in congregational activities (Strength 3)
- * have empowering congregational leaders (Strength 9)
- * have a strong sense of belonging to the congregation (Strength 4)
- * have begun attending the congregation in the last five years (Strength 8)



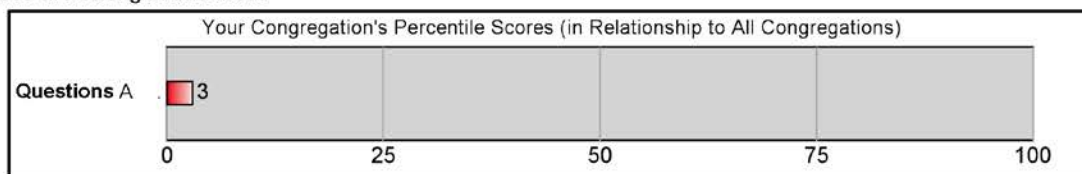
Strength 8
Welcoming New Worshipers

Identity Connections

Is your congregation Welcoming New Worshipers? The chart below displays the one question that makes up this strength and the percentage of worshipers giving that answer. The last line shows your congregation's overall or average score—your congregation's overall score is 8%. You can also see how your scores compare to other congregations of similar size and faith group.

	Welcoming New Worshipers Questions: Percentage of Worshipers Who...	Your Congregation	2008 Average: congregations with less than 100 in worship	2008 Average for all United Methodist Churches
A	Began attending services or activities of your congregation in the last five years	8%	27%	26%
	Overall Welcoming New Worshipers Scores:	8%	27%	26%

The box below shows where your congregation's percentile scores on each question fit in the national picture of all congregations. Your congregation has an overall score that puts it in the 3rd percentile. This means 97% of all congregations scored higher than yours on Welcoming New Worshipers. Congregations in the 80th percentile or above are strong in this area.



New people (those attending five years or less) come from four faith backgrounds:

- 1) **First-timers** (0% in your congregation) are those who have never regularly attended anywhere
- 2) **Returnees** (50% in your congregation) are those coming back after not having attended anywhere for several years
- 3) **Switchers** (25% in your congregation) are those who participated in another congregation with a different faith tradition before coming here
- 4) **Transfers** (25% in your congregation) are those who were participating in another congregation of the same denomination immediately prior to attending your congregation

What We Know about Congregations That Are Welcoming New Worshipers

Congregations and parishes in the top 20%, that is in the 80th percentile or above (where there are many New Worshipers), also tend to be doing well in other areas. Their worshipers are more likely to:

- * be inviting others to worship and talking about their faith (Strength 7)
- * be growing spiritually (Strength 1)



Strength 9

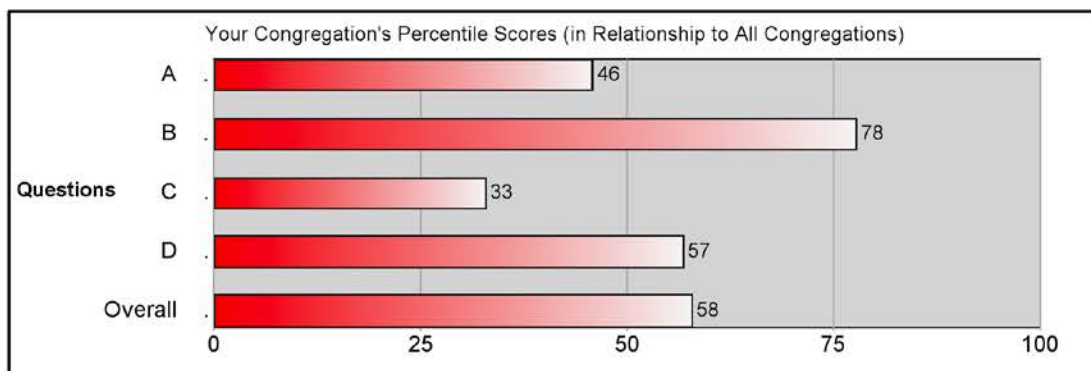
Empowering Leadership

Identity Connections

Does your congregation have Empowering Leadership? The chart below displays the four questions that make up this strength and the percentage of worshipers giving each answer. The last line shows your congregation's overall or average score—your congregation's overall score is 46%. You can also see how your scores compare to other congregations of similar size and faith group.

	Empowering Leadership Questions: Percentage of Worshipers Who...	Your Congregation	2008 Average: congregations with less than 100 in worship	2008 Average for all United Methodist Churches
A	Feel the congregation's leaders encourage them to find and use their gifts to a great extent	31%	35%	34%
B	Feel the minister, pastor, or priest takes into account the ideas of worshipers to a great extent	57%	50%	53%
C	Describe the leadership style of the minister, pastor, or priest as one that inspires people to take action	41%	46%	49%
D	Strongly feel there is a good match between the congregation and the minister, pastor, or priest	53%	47%	49%
	Overall Empowering Leadership Scores:	46%	44%	46%

The box below shows where your congregation's percentile scores on each question fit in the national picture of all congregations. Your congregation has an overall score that puts it in the 58th percentile. This means 42% of all congregations scored higher than yours on Empowering Leadership. Congregations in the 80th percentile or above are strong in this area.



What We Know about Congregations with Empowering Leadership

Congregations and parishes in the top 20%, that is in the 80th percentile or above (where Empowering Leadership is high), also tend to be doing well in other areas. Their worshipers are more likely to:

- * experience meaningful worship in the congregation (Strength 2)
- * have a strong sense of belonging to the congregation (Strength 4)
- * share a strong vision for the congregation's future (Strength 10)
- * be involved in the community (Strength 6)



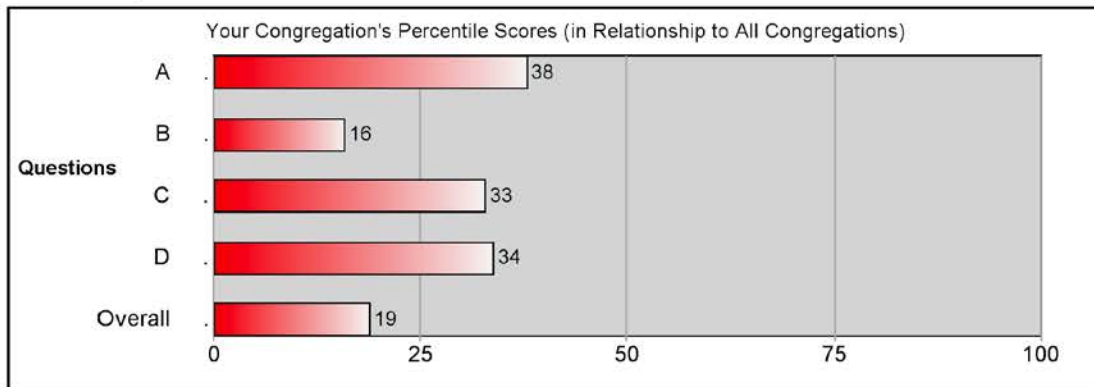
Strength 10
Looking to the Future

Identity Connections

Is your congregation Looking to the Future? The chart below displays the four questions that make up this strength and the percentage of worshipers giving each answer. The last line shows your congregation's overall or average score—your congregation's overall score is 29%. You can also see how your scores compare to other congregations of similar size and faith group.

	Looking to the Future Questions: Percentage of Worshipers Who...	Your Congregation	2008 Average: congregations with less than 100 in worship	2008 Average for all United Methodist Churches
A	Feel the congregation has a clear vision, goals, or direction for its ministry and mission and are strongly committed to them	36%	41%	37%
B	Have a sense of excitement about their congregation's future	11%	25%	22%
C	Feel the congregation is currently moving in new directions	22%	28%	28%
D	Feel the congregation is always ready to try something new	48%	52%	55%
	Overall Looking to the Future Scores:	29%	36%	36%

The box below shows where your congregation's percentile scores on each question fit in the national picture of all congregations. Your congregation has an overall score that puts it in the 19th percentile. This means 81% of all congregations scored higher than yours on Looking to the Future. Congregations in the 80th percentile or above are strong in this area.



What We Know about Congregations That Are Looking to the Future

Congregations and parishes in the top 20%, that is in the 80th percentile or above (where Looking to the Future is high), also tend to be doing well in other areas. Their worshipers are more likely to:

- * have a strong sense of belonging to the congregation (Strength 4)
- * have begun attending the congregation in the last five years (Strength 8)

APPENDIX F
SURVEY #2

**JESSE LEE UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
EASTON, CONNECTICUT 1/5/2014**

Part I: You and Your Congregation

1) How often do you go to worship services at this congregation?

- 0% This is my first time
- 0% Hardly ever or special occasions only
- 0% Less than once a month
- 2% Once a month
- 7% Two or three times a month
- 90% Usually every week
- 0% More than once a week

2) How long have you been going to worship services or activities at this congregation?

- 7% Less than 1 year
- 4% 1-2 years
- 10% 3-5 years
- 5% 6-10 years
- 15% 11-20 years
- 57% More than 20 years
- 2% I am visiting from another congregation
- 0% I am visiting and do not regularly go anywhere else

3) Are you currently a member of this congregation?

- 88% Yes
- 2% No, but I'm in the process of becoming a member
- 5% No, but I regularly participate here
- 5% No

- 4) **Are you regularly involved in any group activities here? (Mark all that apply.)**
- 14% Yes, in Sunday school, church school, or Sabbath school
 - 11% Yes, in prayer, discussion, or Bible study groups
 - 45% Yes, in fellowships, clubs, or other social groups
 - 7% No, we have no group activities
 - 23% No, I am not regularly involved in group activities
- 5) **Do you regularly take part in any activities of this congregation that reach out to the wider community (visitation, evangelism, outreach, community service, social justice)? (Mark all that apply.)**
- 21% Yes, in evangelism or outreach activities
 - 30% Yes, in community service, social justice, or advocacy activities of this congregation
 - 2% No, we don't have such activities
 - 42% No, I am not regularly involved
- 6) **Do you currently have any of the following roles here? (Mark all that apply.)**
- 30% Member of the governing board
 - 33% Member of a congregational committee or task force
 - 9% Leading or assisting in worship
 - 9% Officer or leader of men's, women's youth, or other group
 - 38% Choir member, musician, or choir director
 - 9% Sunday school, church school, or Sabbath school teacher
 - 9% Other role not listed here
 - 19% None
- 7) **To what extent do the worship services or activities of this congregation help you with everyday living?**
- 38% A great extent
 - 47% Some extent
 - 9% A small extent
 - 2% Not at all

Part II: About Your Faith

- 8) **How often do you spend time in private devotional activities (such as prayer, meditation, reading the Bible alone)?**
- 28% Every day or most days
 - 30% A few times a week
 - 0% Once a week
 - 23% Occasionally
 - 7% Hardly ever
 - 7% Never
- 9) **Over the last six months, how much have you grown in your faith? (Mark only one.)**
- 19% No real growth
 - 50% Some growth
 - 16% Much growth, mainly through this congregation
 - 7% Much growth, mainly through other groups or congregation
 - 4% Much growth, mainly through my own private activities
- 10) **Which statement comes closest to your view of the Bible? (Mark only one.)**
- 2% The Bible is the word of God, to be taken literally word for word
 - 21% The Bible is the word of God, to be interpreted in the light of its historical context and the church's teachings
 - 47% The Bible is the word of God, to be interpreted in the light of its historical and cultural context
 - 19% The Bible is not the word of God, but contains God's word to us.
 - 2% The Bible is not the word of God, but is a valuable book
 - 0% The Bible is an ancient book with little value today
 - 4% Don't know

- 11) **Do you agree or disagree with this statement: "All the different religions are equally good ways of helping a person find ultimate truth"?**
- 23% Strongly agree
 - 57% Agree
 - 14% Neutral or unsure
 - 4% Disagree
 - 0% Strongly disagree
- 12) **Do you agree or disagree: "My spiritual needs are being met in this congregation or a parish"?**
- 40% Strongly agree
 - 54% Agree
 - 7% Neutral or unsure
 - 2% Disagree
 - 2% Strongly disagree
- 13) **Which one of the following best describes your readiness to talk to others about your faith? (Mark only one.)**
- 0% I do not have faith, so the question is not applicable
 - 21% I do not talk about my faith; my life and actions are sufficient
 - 9% I find it hard to talk about my faith in ordinary language
 - 59% I mostly feel at ease talking about my faith and do so if it comes up
 - 4% I feel at ease talking about my faith and seek opportunities to do so
- 14) **Have you ever had a conversion experience or a moment of decisive faith commitment?**
- 42% Yes
 - 35% No
 - 16% Not sure

Part III: About Your Involvement

- 15 **Are you involved in any community service, social service, or advocacy groups not connected to this congregation? (Mark all that apply.)**

45% Yes, social service or charity groups
2% Yes, advocacy, justice, or lobbying groups
50% No, I'm not involved with such groups

- 16) **Would you be prepared to invite to a worship service here any of your friends and relatives who do not now attend a congregation?**

50% Yes, and I have done so in the past 12 months
35% Yes, but I have not done so in the past 12 months
7% No, probably not
0% No, definitely not
2% Don't know

- 17) **In the past 6 months, have you done any of the following? (Mark all that apply.)**

16% Loaned money to someone outside your family
23% Cared for someone outside your family who was very sick
19% Helped someone outside your family find a job
61% Donated or prepared food for someone outside your family or congregation
92% Will vote or did vote in the 2008 presidential election
78% Donated money to a charitable organization (other than this congregation)
23% Worked with others to try to solve a community problem
26% Contacted an elected official about a public issue
21% Contributed money to a political party or candidate
38% Spoke at a decision-making meeting of this congregation
9% Went on a mission or service trip

- 18) **How satisfied are you with what is offered here for children and youth (less than 19 years of age)?**
- 19% Very satisfied
 - 40% Satisfied
 - 19% Mixed feelings
 - 2% Dissatisfied
 - 0% Very dissatisfied
 - 11% Not sure or not applicable
- 19) **Do you have any close friends in this congregation?**
- 2% No, I have little contact with others from this congregation outside of activities here
 - 21% No, I have some friends in this congregation, but my closest friends are not involved here
 - 61% Yes, I have some close friends here as well as other close friends who are not part of this congregation
 - 9% Yes, most of my closest friends are part of this congregation
- 20) **Does this congregation have a clear vision, goals, or direction for its ministry and mission?**
- 4% I am not aware of such a vision, goals, or direction
 - 30% There are ideas but no clear vision, goals, or direction
 - 30% Yes, and I am strongly committed to them
 - 26% Yes, and I am partly committed to them
 - 0% Yes, but I am not committed to them
- 21) **Which one statement best describes your involvement in the making of important decisions in this congregation?**
- 35% I have been given the opportunity and often participate in decision-making
 - 23% I have been given the opportunity and occasionally get involved in decision-making
 - 21% I have been given the opportunity but don't usually get involved in decision-making
 - 7% I have not been given an opportunity to be involved and this is fine with me
 - 88% I have not been given an opportunity to be involved and I am not happy about this

- 22) **Do you have a strong sense of belonging to this congregation?**
- 40% Yes, a strong sense of belonging that is growing
 - 47% Yes, a strong sense-about the same as last year
 - 2% Yes, but perhaps not as strong as in the past
 - 2% No, but I am new here
 - 2% No, but I wish I did by now
 - 0% No, but I am happy as I am
 - 0% Not applicable
- 23) **While you may value many different styles of music, which two of the following do you prefer in congregational worship? (Mark up to two.)**
- 80% Traditional hymn
 - 21% Praise music or choruses
 - 35% Contemporary hymns
 - 11% Other contemporary music or songs (not hymns)
 - 9% Sung responsorial psalms
 - 28% Classical music or chorales
 - 0% Contemplative chants (Taize, Iona)
 - 16% Music or songs from a variety of cultures
 - 4% Gospel music
 - 0% No music or songs
 - 0% Don't know
- 24) **Do you agree or disagree: "In general, there is a good match between our congregation and our minister, pastor, priest, or rabbi"?**
- 52% Strongly agree
 - 33% Agree
 - 7% Neutral or unsure
 - 0% Disagree
 - 2% Strongly disagree
 - 0% There is currently no leader here

25) **Which of the following aspects of this congregation do you personally most connected With? (Mark up to three.)**

- 19% Wider community care or social justice emphasis
- 11% Reaching those who do not attend church
- 40% Traditional style of worship or music
- 14% Contemporary style of worship or music
- 26% Sharing in Holy Communion, Eucharist, or the Lord's Supper
- 26% Social activities or meeting new people
- 26% Sermons, preaching, or homilies
- 2% Bible study or prayer groups, other discussion groups
- 11% Ministry for children for youth
- 11% Prayer ministry for one another
- 28% Practical care for one another in times of need
- 0% The congregation's school or pre-school
- 21% Openness to social diversity
- 0% Adult church-school or Sabbath-school classes

26) **Before you started coming to this congregation, were you participating in another congregation?**

- 9% No, I've come here for most or all of my life
- 21% No, before coming here I had not been attending any congregation for several years
- 4% No, before coming here I had never regularly attended
- 57% Yes, immediately prior to coming here, I was participating in another congregation

27) **Before you started coming here, what type of congregation did you attend?**

- 0% Assembly of God
- 0% Baptist
- 23% Catholic
- 2% Episcopal
- 0% Lutheran
- 38% Methodist
- 0% Nazarene
- 2% Non-denominational
- 0% Pentecostal
- 2% Presbyterian
- 0% Seventh-day Adventist
- 7% United Church of Christ
- 11% Other
- 4% I did not attend another congregation before coming here

Part IV: About You

28) **How old are you?**

- 0% 15-24
- 11% 25-44
- 45% 45-64
- 33% 65 and above

29) **What is your gender?**

- 54% Female
- 35% Male

- 30 **What is your employment status? (Mark all that apply.)**
- 40% Employed or self-employed full-time
 - 21% Employed or self-employed part-time
 - 2% Unemployed
 - 28% Retired
 - 9% Full-time homemaker
- 31) **What is the highest educational level you have completed?**
(Reported for worshipers age 25 and older)
- 0% No formal schooling
 - 0% Primary school through 8th grade (K-8)
 - 0% Some high school
 - 16% Completed high school
 - 2% Trade certificate
 - 2% Associate degree
 - 35% Bachelor's degree from a university or college
 - 33% Master's, Doctorate, or other graduate degree
- 32) **What is your present marital status?**
- 0% Never married
 - 61% In first marriage
 - 2% Remarried after divorce
 - 0% Remarried after death of spouse
 - 2% Living in a committed relationship
 - 2% Separated
 - 9% Divorced
 - 9% Widowed
- 33 **Do you have a spouse or partner who is also completing a survey here?**
- 42% Yes
 - 40% No

34 **What is your race or origin? (Mark all that apply.)**

- 2% Asian or Pacific Islander
- 0% Black or African American
- 0% Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin
- 0% Indian (American) or Alaska Native
- 85% White or Caucasian
- 0% Some other race

35) **Where were you born?**

- 88% In the United States
- 2% In another English-speaking country
- 0% In a non-English-speaking country

36 **Where were your parents born?**

- 76% Both born in the United States
- 4% Only father born in the United States
- 4% Only mother born in the United States
- 4% Both father and mother born in another country

37) **Where did you live when you were 5 years old?**

- 88% In the United States
- 2% In another country

38) **When you were 5 years old, was English your primary language?**

- 90% Yes
- 0% No

39) **Which statement best describes the people who currently live in your household?**

- 11% I live alone
- 26% A couple without children
- 2% One adult with child/children
- 35% Two or more adults with child/children
- 14% Some adults living in the same household

40) **What is your zipcode?**

- 35% **06612**
- 7% **06825**
- 5% **06614**
- 7% **06670**
- 12% **06611**

41) **About how much do you give financially to this congregation?**

- 7% I give 10% or more of net income regularly
- 23% I give about 5% to 9% of net income regularly
- 40% I give less than 5% of net income regularly
- 7% I give a small amount whenever I am here
- 0% I do not contribute financially here

42) **Which of the following describes your total annual household income before taxes?**

- 0% Less than \$10,000
- 7% \$10,000 to \$24,999
- 14% \$25,000 to \$49,999
- 9% \$50,000 to \$74,999
- 11% \$75,000 to \$99,999
- 7% \$100,000 to \$124,000
- 2% \$125,000 to \$149,999
- 19% \$150,000 to more

- 43) **Respondents with at least one household member:
(adjusted for multiple responses per household)**
- 4% Less than 6 years old
 - 7% 6 to 12 years old
 - 9% 13 to 18 years old
 - 11% 19 to 24 years old
 - 40% 25 years old or older
- 44) **Respondents with at least one household member participating here**
- 7% Less than 6 years old
 - 7% 6 to 12 years old
 - 2% 13 to 18 years old
 - 11% 19 to 24 years old
 - 40% 25 years old or older
- 45) **How many children of any age do you have, whether they live at home or elsewhere?**
- 11% None
 - 9% One
 - 28% Two
 - 11% Three
 - 23% Four or more
- 46) **How many of your children of any age live at home with you?**
- 40% None
 - 23% One
 - 7% Two
 - 4% Three
 - 9% Four or more

Part V: Some Final Questions

47) **How long does it usually take you to get here?**

- 21% 1-5 minutes
- 35% 6-10 minutes
- 14% 11-15 minutes
- 4% 16-20 minutes
- 9% 21-30 minutes
- 0% More than 30 minutes

48) **Compared to 6 months ago, do you think you participate in activities of the congregation more, less, or about the same amount as you did then?**

- 19% Participate more
- 61% About the same participation
- 4% Participate less
- 4% Not applicable (been coming less than 2 years)

49) **Have this congregation's leaders encouraged you to find and use your gifts and skills here?**

- 26% Yes, to a great extend
- 45% Yes, to some extend
- 11% Yes, to a small extend
- 0% Not at all
- 4% Don't know

50) **How often do you experience the following during worship services at this congregation?**

(Always or Usually)

- 42% A sense of God's presence
- 66% Inspiration
- 7% Boredom
- 0% Awe or mystery
- 30% Joy
- 7% Frustration
- 4% Spontaneity
- 19% A sense of fulfilling my obligation

51) **Do you agree or disagree: "Only followers of Jesus Christ can be saved"?**

- 2% Strongly agree
- 4% Agree
- 14% Neutral or unsure
- 40% Disagree
- 26% Strongly disagree

52) **Do you agree or disagree: "I have a sense of excitement about our congregation's future?"**

- 14% Strongly agree
- 47% Agree
- 21% Neutral or unsure
- 7% Disagree
- 0% Strongly disagree

53) **Over the last two years, has there been any conflict in this congregation?**

(Mark only one.)

- 23% No conflict that I am aware of
- 47% Some minor conflict
- 0% Major conflict
- 2% Major conflict, with leaders or people leaving

16% Don't know

54) **Of the following, which one best describes your opinion of the future directions of this congregation?**

0% We need to get back to the way we did things in the past

4% We are faithfully maintaining past directions

30% We are currently deciding on new directions

23% We are currently moving in new directions

4% We need to rethink where we are heading

4% Our future is very unclear or doubtful

16% Don't know

55) **Do you agree or disagree: "This congregation is always ready to try something new"?**

14% Strongly agree

50% Agree

14% Neutral or unsure

7% Disagree

0% Strongly disagree

56) **To what extent does the minister, pastor, or priest here take into account the ideas of those who worship here?**

50% A great extent

23% Some extent

2% A small extent

0% Not at all

11% Don't know

0% There is currently no leader here

57) **Which of the following is the best description of the style of leadership of your pastor, minister, or priest?**

- 19% Leadership that tends to take charge
- 50% Leadership that inspires people to take action
- 11% Leadership that acts on goals that people here have been involved in setting
- 7% Leadership where the people start most things
- 0% There is currently no leader here
- 9% Don't know

58) **Do you agree or disagree: "God is directly involved in worldly affairs"?**

- 9% Strongly agree
- 30% Agree
- 30% Neutral or unsure
- 7% Disagree
- 0% Strongly disagree
- 0% I don't believe in God

59) **Do you agree or disagree: "God is angered by human sin"?**

- 7% Strongly agree
- 21% Agree
- 23% Neutral or unsure
- 19% Disagree
- 9% Strongly disagree
- 0% I don't believe in God

60) **Which of the following terms best describes your current stand on theological issues?**

- 2% Very conservative
- 11% Conservative
- 28% Right in the middle
- 30% Liberal

7% Very liberal

61) **Have you participated in a Bible Study, devotional or prayer meeting in last 6 months?**

14% Yes

71% No

APPENDIX G
BIBLE STUDY

BOOK OF ROMANS



Letters by Paul (at least credited to him)

- Romans
- 1 & 2 Corinthians
- Galatians
- Ephesians
- Philippians
- Colossians
- 1 & 2 Thessalonians
- 1 & 2 Timothy
- Titus
- Philemon
- Hebrews
- James
- 1 & 2 Peter
- 1, 2, & 3 John
- Jude

Main Theme of these letters

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone.

In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling place for God. . . .

so that through the church the wisdom of God in its rich variety might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places.

-Ephesians 2:19-22, 3:10 (NRSV)

Another word . . .

“The aim of God in history is the creation of an all-inclusive community of loving persons with God himself at the very center of this community as its prime Sustainer and most glorious Inhabitant.”

-Eugene Peterson

- Romans is a work of spiritual formation in a community of souls.
- Spiritual formation - is the growth and development of the whole person by an intentional focus on one's
 - ♦ Spiritual and interior life
 - ♦ Interactions with others in ordinary life
 - ♦ The spiritual discipline ([prayer](#), the study of [scripture](#), [fasting](#), simplicity, [solitude](#), [confession](#), [worship](#), etc.).

Spiritual Discipline

- Spiritual Discipline is . . . An intentionally directed action by which we do what we can do in order to receive from God the ability (power) to do what we cannot do by direct effort.



Paul's Letter to the Romans

- To encourage and guide Christians in living their lives Christianly, that is, living lives formed by the Spirit in Jesus Christ.
- Directed toward daily, ordinary living.
- In context of a congregation of souls, men and women who are called upon to:
 - Repent and believe
 - Obey and love
 - Pray and forgiveas they go about their daily lives of preparing meals, raising children, and going to work.

Four aspects of spiritual formation

- Submission to Scripture
- Embrace of mystery
- Use of language
- Insistence on community



Submission to Scripture

- Paul's relationship to the scripture is not that of a student procrastinating for an exam, but that of a disciple of Jesus living the text.
- His first encounter with the Scriptures was that of Pharisee, using Scriptures zealously but wrongly.
- The second part of his life he encounters the Scriptures as a Christian, living once again zealously but differently.

Submission to Scripture

- *The difference was this:*
 - *as an activist Pharisee he used the Scriptures to support an angry crusade;*
 - *as a believing Christian he let the Spirit use the Scriptures to form Christ in him.*

The Scriptures furnish his vocabulary, shape his imagination, form his life.

Use of Old Testament by Paul in Romans

- 65 quotations from Old Testament (from Genesis to Malachi)
- His favorite books are
 - Isaiah (quoted 18 times)
 - Psalm (quoted 16 times)
- He not only quotes but inhabits the Scriptures
- To borrow from Scottish pastor Alexander Whyte:
 - The Scriptures had become “all over autobiographic” for Paul

Embrace of Mystery

- *Embedded in Paul's Letter to the Romans is his extravagant embrace of mystery.*
- His celebrated outburst in 11:33-36 is characteristic: "O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! 'For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?' [Isaiah 40:13-14]. 'Or who has given a gift to him, to receive a gift in return?' [Job 35:7, 41:11]. For from him and through him and to him all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen."

Embrace of Mystery

- The mystery that Paul embraces is not the mystery of darkness that must be dispelled, but the mystery of light that may be entered.



Use of Metaphorical Language

- The way we use language is critical in spiritual formation.
- Gospel Message in Romans: “The word is near you, on your lips and in your heart” (Rom 10:8, quoting Deut 30:14).
- The way Paul uses language in Romans is to load it with metaphor

Metaphor

- Metaphor is not a precise use of language

What is a metaphor?

A metaphor is a comparison between two nouns that does NOT use "like" or "as".

For example: *Her voice is a nice song.* We are comparing the sound of her voice to a nice sounding song.

Examples:

She is a shining star in her class.



That desk is a pigpen!



Wiki says . .

- A **metaphor** is a [figure of speech](#) that describes a subject by asserting that it is, on some point of comparison, the same as another otherwise unrelated object.
- Metaphor is a type of [analogy](#) and is closely related to other [rhetorical figures of speech](#) that achieve their effects via association, comparison or resemblance including [allegory](#), [hyperbole](#), and [simile](#).

“the LORD is my rock” (Ps 18:2)

God is a “rock” ?



Do we like things tidy and neat?



*That is not the kind of language
we find in Romans.*

Paul's language is a living energy field.



*Spiritual formation requires this lively,
participatory language.*

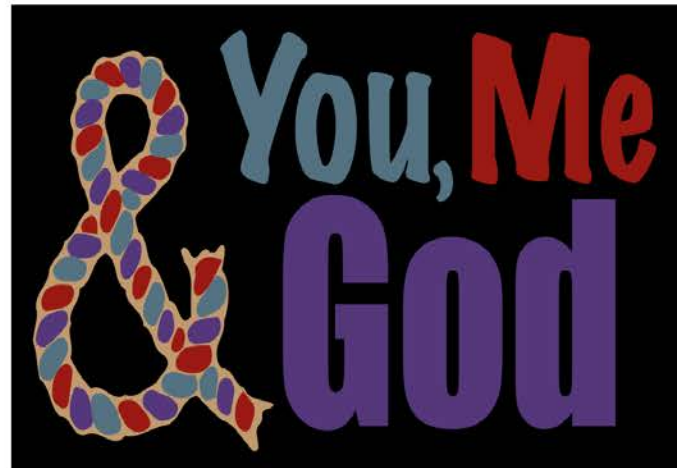
Insistence on Community

- *Spiritual formation can never take place in isolation or develop in impersonal or functional ways.*



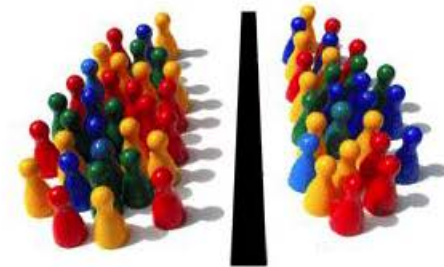
Insistence on Community

- *Spiritual formation is never just between me and God.*
- *Persons, persons-in-relationship, are necessarily involved.*



Structure of Romans

- *In chapters 1-8 Paul deals with Jews' prejudice against Gentiles*
- *In chapters 9-11 he turns the tables: "Now I am speaking to you Gentiles" (11:13).*
- *In the final chapters (12-16) Paul instructs them in the formation of community*



Romans Chapter 1

- First, I thank my God. . .
- Read Romans 1:1-17
- What are you thankful today?



BOOK OF ROMANS



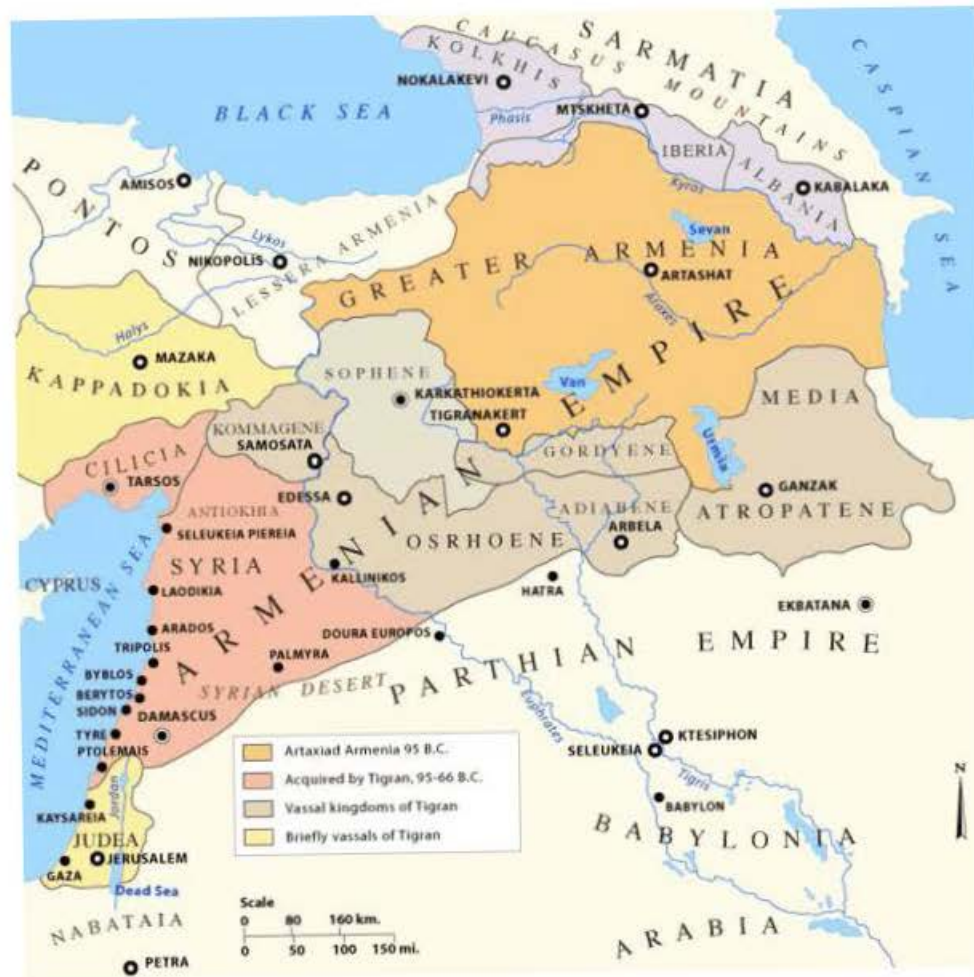
St. Peter's Basilica

Christians: Jew and Gentile

- Christian preaching rejected the “traditions of Israel”
- Paul’s Christianity too easy
- King Izates of Adiabene



Adiabene Palaces and Lower City during the Second Temple Period



Four Different types of Jewish/Gentiles Christianity in New Testament

- Gentiles who became Jews
- Gentiles living within Israel
- Gentiles not under the law
- Jesus has replaced Judaism

Spiritual Disciplines in Romans

- Secrecy: Consciously refraining from having our good deeds and qualities generally known, which, in turn, rightly disciplines our longing for recognition.
- Romans 2:1-16

Spiritual Disciplines in Romans

- Study: The intentional process of engaging the mind with the written and spoken Word of God and the world God has created in such a way that the mind takes on an order conforming to the order upon which it concentrates.
- Romans 2:17-29

Responding

- As children, most of us looked forward to going to school to study and learn but as we grow older, we often become jaded and disinterested.
- What action can we take so that we stay continuously energized and interested in studying and learning about the with-God life?

Spiritual Disciplines in Romans

- Silence: Closing off our souls from “sounds,” whether noise, music, or words, so that we may better still the inner chatter and clatter of our noisy hearts and be increasingly attentive to God.
- Romans 3:1-20

Spiritual Disciplines in Romans

- THE WITH-GOD LIFE: Romans 6:13 gives a picture of a people presenting their “members” to God so that they can be used to bring goodness into the world. During your next time alone with God, dedicate your limbs and body to God’s service.
- Romans 6:1-13

My Pledge

“I dedicate my head to clearer thinking, my heart to greater love, my hands to larger service, and my health to righteous living, for my family my worship community, my God, and his kingdom.”

BOOK OF ROMANS week 3



Vatican City: <http://desktop.freewallpaper4.me/download/6508/vatican-city>

The With-God Life

THE WITH-GOD LIFE:

The Bible is all about human life “with God” and how God has made this “with-God” life possible and will bring it to pass. The name Immanuel, meaning “God is with us,” is the title given to the one and only Redeemer, because it refers to God’s everlasting intend for human life – namely, that we should be in every aspect a dwelling place of God.

SACRIFICE

SACRIFICE: Deliberately forsaking the security of satisfying our own needs with our resources in the faith and hope that God will sustain us.

- Romans 3:21-31



<http://www.biblestudyforyou.com/bible-study/living-sacrifices/>

SACRIFICE

- 3:23 *All have sinned.* The relentless insistence that we all have sinned is not a blanket condemnation telling us how bad we are; it simply clears away any assumption that we have it within ourselves to form our own spirituality. We don't. Not even a little bit. Once we get this through our heads, we will be saved from a lot of false starts.

SACRIFICE

- 3:24-25 *redemption . . . atonement*. All the energy and action of the Christian life come from Jesus: God in Christ sets us right with himself. “Redemption” and “atonement” are gateway words into vast mysteries, words we cannot hope to completely comprehend, but ones we can spend the rest of our lives entering into and letting continuously expand our living space. The beyond-our-comprehension reality at the heart of the universe is that God in Christ on the cross had forgiven all our sins, set us right with him, and gathered us into his righteousness. We cannot comprehend it, but we can most certainly live it – a way of life in which everything about us is and continues to be formed in the likeness of Christ.

SUBMISSION

SUBMISSION: Subordination to the guidance of God; within the Christian fellowship, a constant mutual subordination out of reverence for Christ, which opens the way for particular subordination to those who are qualified to direct our efforts toward Christlikeness and who then add the weight of their wise authority on the side of our willing spirit to help us do the things we would like to do and refrain from doing the things we don't want to do.

SUBMISSION

- SUBMISSION: Subordination to the guidance of God; within the Christian fellowship, a constant mutual subordination out of reverence for Christ, which opens the way for particular subordination to those who are qualified to direct our efforts toward Christlikeness and who then add the weight of their wise authority on the side of our willing spirit to help us do the things we would like to do and refrain doing the things we don't want to do.
- Romans 8:1-17 (Life in the Spirit)

SUBMISSION



<https://siboliban.org/bio2/happiness.html>

- WHAT DO YOU THINK?

SUBMISSION

- Romans 12:1
- Responding: In commenting on this verse, Richard Foster says that the problem with a “living” sacrifice is that it always wants to get off the altar. On a scale of 1 to 10 (“easy” to “hard”), rank the difficulty you think you would have in giving your entire being – thoughts, words, and actions – to God. As you go about your work this week, make every effort to dedicate everything you think, say, or do to God. How often did you want to get off the altar?

SUBMISSION

- Romans 8:1
- *No condemnation.* Guilt is the crudest of blunt instruments for forming Christian identity and conduct. Its effects, though sometimes immediately dramatic, are short-lived. It is part of the Gospel to reduce us to the cowering, frightened condition of trapped animals. Whatever “sentence” has been laid on us by another person, our conscience, or the world in general is commuted by Christ. No condemnation – what a verdict!

SUBMISSION

- Romans 8:2
- *the law of the Spirit of life . . . the law of sin and of death.* The words chosen for “life” and “death” dramatize the power of the Greek language. Here, “life” (*zōē*) means the eternal, uncreated life that originates in God alone. “Death” (*thanatos*) is not simply physical death, but spiritual death. In essence, Paul says that while we are physically alive, we can experience eternal life or spiritual death.

SUBMISSION

- Romans 8:11
- *the Spirit of him who raised Jesus.* Resurrection is the biggest things about Jesus. It is also the biggest thing about us. The very same Spirit who raised Jesus from the tomb raises us from a dead life. Paul works every variation he can come up with to get us to understand, and to get it deep into our imaginations, that the same resurrection miracle that brought Jesus alive brings us alive. Resurrection is the most unnoticed and underappreciated miracle that takes place in our common lives. But, of course, that's the way it was also with Jesus, hardly noticed at the time and certainly by nobody in authority or of "importance."

THE WITH-GOD LIFE

- What do these scriptures say about The With-God Life for me? What is one thing that I can do this week to live the With-God Life?
- Romans 6:23 & Romans 8:11-13

BOOK OF ROMANS week 4



http://www.pictorome.com/travel/rome/castle-sant-angelo-seen-from-the-bridge_06.jpg

PRAYER

- PRAYER: Interactive conversation with God about what we and God are thinking and doing together.
- Romans 8:18-30



<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Two-people-talking-logo.jpg>

PRAYER

- Romans 8:22-23 *the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains*. This is a bold metaphor: the very creation pregnant! Labor pains, birth pangs, are signs of an imminent and glorious birth, the “redemption of our bodies.” This is certainly a different way of understanding groans and suffering. And it makes it impossible to understand Christian growth as something private, isolated from everything that is going on in creation and history.

PRAYER

- Romans 8:27 *the Spirit intercedes*. When we pray, we are never “on our own.” The Spirit at all times is praying in and for us. This means that the primary energy and influence in our spiritual formation are not our will or knowledge, not our determination or stamina, but the ever-present and active Spirit. Prayer involves far more than God’s listening to us; the greater part of prayer, as in so much else, is the active intercessory *Presence* of the Spirit of God in our lives.

PRAYER

- Romans 8:26
- Responding: What do you think it means that the “Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words”? Can you recall any similar experience? What did you learn from it?

WORSHIP

WORSHIP: Expressing in words, music, rituals, and silent adoration the greatness, beauty, and goodness of God, by means of which we enter the supranatural reality of the *shekinah*, or glory, of God.

- Romans 12:1-8

WORSHIP

- Romans 12:1 *therefore . . . present your bodies as a living sacrifice*. The “therefore” signals a shift of emphasis. Are we, Jews and Gentiles, now on common ground? Are we, sinners all, brothers and sisters in Christ? Do we understand that Jesus is our Savior? Do we realize that we are all, every one of us, new creatures, resurrection men and women through the work of the Holy Spirit? Well, then – therefore! – let us live this new life to the hilt, placing our bodies simply, wholly, believingly on the altar, a daily offering so that God can work his will in us.

WORSHIP

- Romans 12:6 *gifts that differ*. The Christian life is not monochrome. Yes, we are all the same, sharing a common Christ identity, yet we are all different; each of us is uniquely gifted to live out this endlessly creative identity in fresh and particular ways.

THE WITH-GOD LIFE

- What do the scripture say about The With-God Life for me?
What is one thing that I can do this week to live the With-God life?
- **Romans 8:11-13 (The Message)**
It stands to reason, doesn't it, that if the alive-and-present God who raised Jesus from the dead moves into your life, he'll do the same thing in you that he did in Jesus, bringing you alive to himself? When God lives and breathes in you (and he does, as surely as he did in Jesus), you are delivered from that dead life. With his Spirit living in you, your body will be as alive as Christ's! So don't you see that we don't owe this old do-it-yourself life one red cent. There's nothing in it for us, nothing at all. The best thing to do is give it a decent burial and get on with your new life.

BOOK OF ROMANS week 5



<http://www.piodoname.com/travel/rome/ancient-fountain-on-the-palatine-hill.jpg.php>

Confession

- **Confession: Sharing our deepest weaknesses and failures with God and trusted others, so that we may enter into God's grace and mercy and experience his ready forgiveness and healing.**
- **Romans 10:5-13**

Confession

**“At the heart of God is the desire to give and to forgive. Because of this, he set into motion the entire redemptive process that culminated in the cross and was confirmed in the resurrection. The usual notion of what Jesus did on the cross runs something like this: people were so bad and so mean and God was so angry with them that he could not forgive them unless somebody big enough took the rap for the whole lot of them. Nothing can be further from the truth.”
(Celebration of Discipline, pg. 143 Richard Foster)**

Confession

Romans 10:9-10

Beyond the fact that we will be saved, why is it important for us to confess with our lips that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him from the dead? As a short exercise today, say aloud twenty times, “Jesus, whom God raised from the dead, is Lord.” How did it affect your heart?

Fellowship

- **Fellowship – Engaging with other disciples in the common activities of worship, study, prayer, celebration, and service, which sustain our life together and enlarge our capacity to experience more of God.**
- **Romans 14:1-12**

Fellowship

Romans 14:10

Where have you seen fellowship destroyed by judgmental criticisms and gossip?

Try this month to speak words of encouragement and hope that build community at every possible opportunity.

BOOK OF ROMANS week 6



http://www.freemages.fr/album/italie/rome_fontaine_trevi_1.jpg

Service

- **Service: Loving, thoughtful, active promotion of the good of others and the causes of God in our world, through which we experience the many little deaths of going beyond ourselves.**
- **Romans 12:11**
- **Romans 13:6**
- **Romans 15:16**

APPENDIX H
DEVOTIONAL

Introduction to 5 Minutes Devotional on Romans:

The letters of Paul in the New Testament takes up major part of the New Testaments. These letters are written with intention to promote God's community in a new world. As Christianity began to expand and grow the need to explore the meaning of "community in Christ" became crucial for those who take upon the teachings of Jesus Christ.

Today the Church is facing similar dilemma as we begin to find ourselves competing for place in the world with many non-profit social organizations that do many similar humanity works. Hence, the question of "What is the Church?" "Is the Church valid in 21st Century world?" becomes part of our conversation. With many sentiments of "no-organize religion" it is crucial for the Church to begin to understand its identity and purpose.

While many books and articles are written about how can churches address the needs of the 21st centuries, there is no more talk of church's identity and purpose. I have started this project with the understanding of how to help a church address its conflicts, which seems to rise throughout many mainline denominational church, I have learned that these conflicts are indicators of this need for the church to once again claim its identity in the 21st century. Another word, the Church needs to be clear about its identity, the Community of God, and then begin the work of how can this community of God find its place in the world to build the kingdom of God.

In order to acquire this understanding, we first must become the citizen of the Kingdom of God. Through the devotion of Romans for next 6 weeks you are invited to take 5 minutes of you day to begin the thought process of how to become citizens of the kingdom of God.

Day 1

Thankfulness . . . Beginning of New Life

First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for all of us, because your faith is proclaimed throughout the world. (Romans 1:8)

Paul, mature in all matters of spiritual formation, begins, as life itself begins, with gratitude for lives placed in his care. Life in itself – sheer, raw, unadorned life – is pure gift. Spontaneous, grateful thanksgiving establishes the working conditions for all growth and development in Christ. (from The Life with God Bible)



"Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending."

— Maria Robinson, From Birth to One

<http://picdrome.com/nature/bud-in-spring.jpg.php>

Day 2

Encouragement

. . . or rather so that we may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith, both yours and mine.

(Romans 1:12)

There are no "masters" in the spiritual life. Mature and wise teachers, yes. But fundamentally we are all beginners receiving and giving on our knees before God and with open hands before one another. In this business no one "lords it over" another. (from The Life With God Bible)



"Our chief want is someone who will inspire us to be what we know we could be."

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

Other Scriptural References: Mark 10:45 and Galatians 3:28

(Costa Rica Mission Trip 2005)

Day 3

Faith

For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith; as it is written, “The one who is righteous will live by faith. (Romans 1:17)



Faith is not “believing in something without proof,” but trusting in someone in a participating way. It is not just thinking with our minds; it is assenting with our lives. It is how we get it on the righteousness of God.

“The best way to find out if you can trust somebody is to trust them.”

— Ernest Hemingway

(http://farm8.staticflickr.com/7154/6827018401_9ed80646f4_z.jpg)

Day 4

Judgment

Therefore you have no excuse, whoever you are, when you judge others; for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, are doing the very same things. (Romans 2:1)



Looking around and clucking with disapproval at what others do wrong is a time-honored way of averting detection of our own wrongs.

Cataloguing wrongs, whether in our family, our neighborhood, or the world, does not qualify as a spiritual life, and God has no patience with it. (from The Life With God Bible)

When a man points a finger at someone else, he should remember that four of his fingers are pointing at himself. - Louis Nizer

(<http://uthmag.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/how-to-expect-less-of-people-11.jpg>)

Day 5

Shhhh . . . it's a secret.

...on the day when, according to my gospel, God, through Jesus Christ, will judge the secret thoughts of all. (Romans 2:16)

SECRECY: Consciously refraining from having our good deeds and qualities generally known, which, in turn, rightly disciplines our longing for recognition.



Secrecy is abstaining "from causing our good deeds and qualities to be known." Dallas Willard

(<http://nodroppedstitches.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/garden-pictures-023.jpg>)

Day 6

Teachers . . . We are

. . . you then, that teach others, will you not teach yourself? While you preach against stealing, do you steal? (Romans 2:21)

Teaching is so much easier than learning. It is also more dangerous. In the act of teaching, especially when we know what we are saying is right, we inevitably sense that we embody what we teach. The admiration and appreciation of others reinforce the feeling. Meanwhile, a huge gap gradually widens between what we say and the way we live. It happens a lot in life, but nowhere with more deadly consequences than among those who teach about God and his ways with us. (from The Life With God Bible)



“Example isn't another way to teach, it is the only way to teach”

– Albert Einstein

http://fc09.deviantart.net/fs70/i/2011/133/1/2/follow_the_leader_by_daedalusnova-d3g9tix.jpg

Day 7

Silence . . . if gold?

Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced, and the whole world may be held accountable to God. (Romans 3:19)

SILENCE: Closing off our souls from “sounds,” whether noise, music, or words, so that we may better still the inner chatter and clatter of our noisy hearts and be increasingly attentive to God.



http://farm8.staticflickr.com/7151/6631174273_b9b0abc7ed_z.jpg

“There is always music amongst the trees in the garden, but our hearts must be very quiet to hear it.” - Minnie Aumonier quotes

Day 8

Sinner

. . . since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Romans 3:23)

The relentless insistence that we all have sinned is not a blanket condemnation telling us how bad we are; it simply clears away any assumption that we have it within ourselves to form our own spirituality. We don't. Not even a little bit. Once we get this through our heads, we will be saved from a lot of false starts. (from The Life With God Bible)



God creates out of nothing. Wonderful you say. Yes, to be sure, but he does what is still more wonderful: he makes saints out of sinners. –

Soren Kierkegaard

<http://beccasheppard.files.wordpress.com/2012/03/muddy-pig.jpeg?w=343&h=379>

Day 9

Redemption . . . atonement

They are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a sacrifice of atonement by his blood, effective through faith. He did this to show his righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over the sins previously committed. (Romans 3:24-25)

. . . “Redemption” and “atonement” are gateway words into vast mysteries, words we cannot hope to completely comprehend, but ones we can spend the rest of our lives entering into and letting continuously expand our living space. The beyond-our-comprehension reality at the heart of the universe is that God in Christ on the cross has forgiven all our sins, set us right with him, and gathered us into his righteousness. We cannot comprehend it, but we can most certainly live it — a way of life in which everything about us is and continues to be formed in the likeness of Christ. (from *The Life With God Bible*)



“Jesus is God's way of refusing to give up his dream for the world.”

— Rob Bell

<http://www.photohome.com/pictures/texas-pictures/galveston/storm-of-1900-statue-1a.jpg>

Day 10

Yourself as sacrifice . . . spiritual worship.

I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. (Romans 12:1)

In commenting on this verse, Richard Foster says that the problem with a “living” sacrifice is that it always wants to get off the altar. On a scale of 1 to 10 (“easy” to “hard”), rank the difficulty you think you would have in giving your entire being – thoughts, words, and actions – to God. As you go about your work this week, make every effort to dedicate everything you think, say, or do to God. How often did you want to get off the altar?



http://farm4.staticflickr.com/3112/3246831417_55cb3ecb47_z.jpg

“If you only do what you know you can do- you never do very much.”

- Tom Krause quotes (motivational speaker, Teacher and Coach,
b.1934)

Day 11

Submit to Float in the Water

“To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For this reason the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God’s law – indeed it cannot.”

(Romans 8:6-7)

Submission: Subordination to the guidance of God; within the Christian fellowship, a constant mutual subordination out of reverence for Christ, which opens the way for particular subordination to those who are qualified to direct our efforts toward Christlikeness and who then add the weight of their wise authority on the side of our willing spirit to help us do the things we would like to do and refrain from doing the things we don’t want to do. (The Life with God Bible)



<http://www.building-your-model-railroad.com/images/tracks01.jpg>

“True strength lies in submission which permits one to dedicate his life, through devotion, to something beyond himself.”

- Henry Miller quotes (American Author and Writer, 1891-1980)

Day 12

Faith . . . Standing Still before God

For what does the scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” (Romans 4:3)

Three verbs are used to describe Abraham’s relationship with God that made him righteous: “believe”, “trust”, and “have faith”. All three verbs indicate a trusting readiness to let God work his will in Abraham without any well-intentioned assistance from Abraham. (from The Life with God Bible)



http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/1/1a/Stand_Still,_Hoboken%2C_NJ.jpg

“Stand still. The trees ahead and bush beside you are not lost.”

- Albert Einstein quotes

Day 13

Promise of faith . . . righteousness

For the promise that he would inherit the world did not come to Abraham or to his descendants through the law but through the righteousness of faith. (Romans 4:13)

The Spiritual Disciplines are tools to getting closer to God. Hence, any acts of good are means and not the end to being in the presence of God. Are our good deeds to prove that we are good?



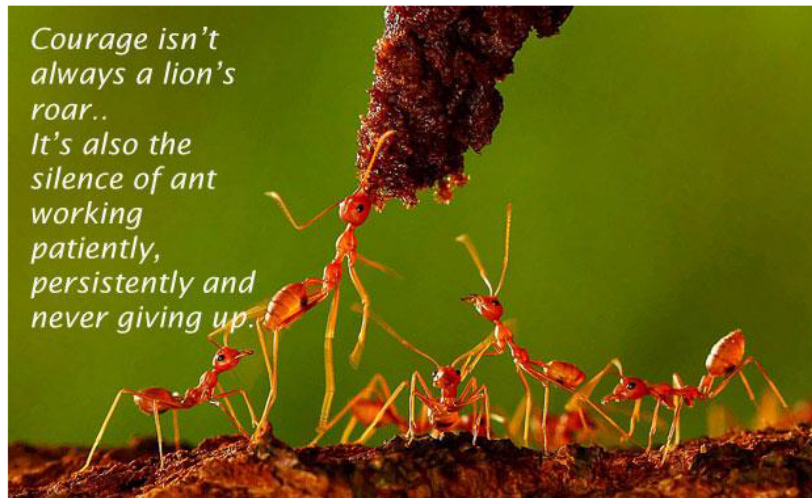
“Faith allows things to happen. It is the power that comes from a fearless heart. And when a fearless heart believes, miracles happen.” – anonymous

Day 14

Hope to Courage

. . . but we also boast in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us. (Romans 5:3b-5)

When we can stop focusing on things we want, we may realize that most of what we want is not so important after all. Then, what should we hope for in life? True hope will raise courage in you to hold on.



Day 15

God's love is . . .

But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

At the heart of God is the desire to give and to forgive. Because of this, he set into motion the entire redemptive process that culminate in the cross and was confirmed in the resurrection. . . . Golgotha came as a result of God's great desire to forgive, not his reluctance. (from *Celebration of Discipline*, Richard Foster)



<http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-c958j6AMVEk/T554knzwhil/AAAAAAAAFwo/WStG--uKu5A/s1600/forgiveness-copy.jpg>

"Love is an act of endless forgiveness, a tender look which becomes a habit." - Peter Ustinov quotes (English actor and writer, b. 1921)

Day 16

God's Grace in Work

Therefore just as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. (Romans 5:18)

Sin and death, introduced by Adam, as extensive and terrible as they are, turn out to be a puny business compared to the free gift of life accomplished by Jesus Christ. When it's sin versus grace, grace wins hands down. (from The Life with God Bible)



"I am only one, but I am one. I can't do everything, but I can do something. The something I ought to do, I can do. And by the grace of God, I will." - Edward Everett Hale quotes (American Clergyman and Writer, 1822-1909)

Day 17

Baptism . . . death to old, life to new.

Do you know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:3-4)

Many Christians today were baptized when they were infants and don't remember their own baptism. Hence, it is hard for us to envision emersion into the water as symbolism of dying. But we are called to know the dying of our old self and to rise to a new life. We can celebrate the death in our lives because through it God brings new life.



“Love is stronger than death even though it can't stop death from happening, but no matter how hard death tries it can't separate people from love. It can't take away our memories either. In the end, life is stronger than death.” - anonymous

Day 18

Enslave to God to be Free

But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:22-23)

A significant aspect of Christian spiritual formation involves acquiring a vocabulary and imagination adequate to the new reality in which we live, terms and concepts that give us access to grand, expansive, all-life-involving phrases like “enslaved to Go.” (from Life with God Bible)



<http://fairygodsister.files.wordpress.com/2012/04/set-free.jpg>

For to be free is not merely to cast off one's chains, but to live in a way that respects and enhances the freedom of others. - Nelson Mandela

Day 19

From Law to Life with God.

In the same way, my friends, you have died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you may belong to another, to him who has been raised from the dead in order that we may bear fruit for God. (Romans 7:4)

Mosaic Law has been used to help people understand how to live a righteous life, "with-God" life. Paul tells us we no longer need laws when we follow the teachings of Jesus to live a life that will please God. As we die to the law, we find life with God.

Below is the 2000 years old palm seed that is grew into a palm tree.



"My environment can give me relief from sin and tension, only the Lord can cure it." – Henry Brandt

Day 20

Real you . . . the way God intended

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. (Romans 7:15)

There is no use looking for a “secret” to the spiritual life that exempts us from trouble and conflict, defeat and doubt, despair and inadequacy. If there ever was such a secret, it is odd that it was withheld from Job, David, Jeremiah, Elijah, Paul, and even Jesus. (from The Life with God Bible) Only through “Life-with-God” do we gain strength, wisdom and understanding that give us peace in our hearts to find true self.



<http://glamslamblog.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/RAINBOW-OVER-NYC-AFTER-SANDY1.jpg>

“Whatever we are waiting for - peace of mind, contentment, grace, the inner awareness of simple abundance - it will surely come to us, but only when we are ready to receive it with an open and grateful heart.”

- Sarah Ban Breathnach

Day 21

Life giving

“If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also though his Spirit that dwells in you.” (Romans 8:11)

Resurrection is the biggest thing about Jesus. It is also the biggest thing about us. The very same Spirit who raised Jesus from the tomb raises us from a dead life.



farm3.staticflickr.com/2833/10097720054_c0a58ed60b_z.jpg

“Courageous risks are life-giving, they help you grow, make you brave, and better than you think you are.” – Anonymous

Day 22

Birth pain . . . death . . . joy

We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. (Romans 8:22-23)

We live in a society where we consider pain as bad. But in order for a mother to give birth she has to endure pain so great she feels like she is going to die. Not all pain is bad and we are called to discern what God is trying to tell us through our pain. If it is a labor pain, then we can celebrate that there will be joy of new birth at the end.



http://farm6.staticflickr.com/5150/5662346740_75af24a4ea_z.jpg

The pains of childbirth were altogether different from the enveloping effects of other

kinds of pain. These were pains one could follow with one's mind.

- Margaret Mead

Day 23

Praying

Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words. And God, who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Romans 8:26-27)

What do you think it means that the “Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words”? Can you recall any similar experience? What did you learn from it?



<http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-y0OuHbcz1TQ/UZo50oV0tmi/AAAAAAAAAPNc/4qvNdvg71Ls/s1600/prayer.png>

Prayer is not asking. It is a longing of the soul. It is daily admission of one's weakness. It is better in prayer to have a heart without words than words without a heart. - Mahatma Gandhi

Day 24

Things do work out.

We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. (Romans 8:28)

When things don't work out we get discouraged and no longer see our dream that drove us. Let us remember that our dreams from God are not just illusions but part of God's purpose.



<http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-O5arifyNHwc/T6Q1TOdQ8dl/AAAAAAAAAOE/DLbbliRkPf8/s1600/beautiful-clouds-dreamcatchers-love-photography-Favim.com-360852.jpg>

If you lose hope, somehow you lose the vitality that keeps life moving, you lose that courage to be, that quality that helps you go on in spite of it all. And so today I still have a dream.

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

Day 25

Bond that cannot be broken.

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)

What does it mean for us to be in eternal bond with love of God? When we are “of God” we are also connected with those who are “of God.”

How can we respond to each other as we reflect on God’s love?



<http://stickyjesus.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/cross-hands1-198x300.jpg>

“Our family is a circle of love and strength. With every birth and every union, the circle grows. Every joy shared adds more love. Every obstacle faced together makes the circle stronger.” – Anonymous

Day 26

What do you see?

Even before they had been born or had done anything good or bad (so that God's purpose of election might continue, not by works but by his call). . . (Romans 9:11-12a)

God's purposes work at a deeper level than can be observed by adding up human motives and actions. God's willing and acting, often hidden to our eyes, work salvation beyond our figuring out. There is more here than meets the eye . . . (from The Life with God Bible)



http://farm6.staticflickr.com/5187/5663682641_9354524245_z.jpg

Day 27

Being molded

Has the potter no right over the clay, to make out of the same lump one object for special use and another for ordinary use? . . . and what if he has done so in order to make known the riches of his glory for the objects of mercy, which he has prepared beforehand for glory – (Romans 9:21, 23)

We don't know why each of us is given different life. We know God does not work within our capacity of understanding and in that purpose we find joy.



http://farm6.staticflickr.com/5142/5633697134_bf6eda0519_z.jpg

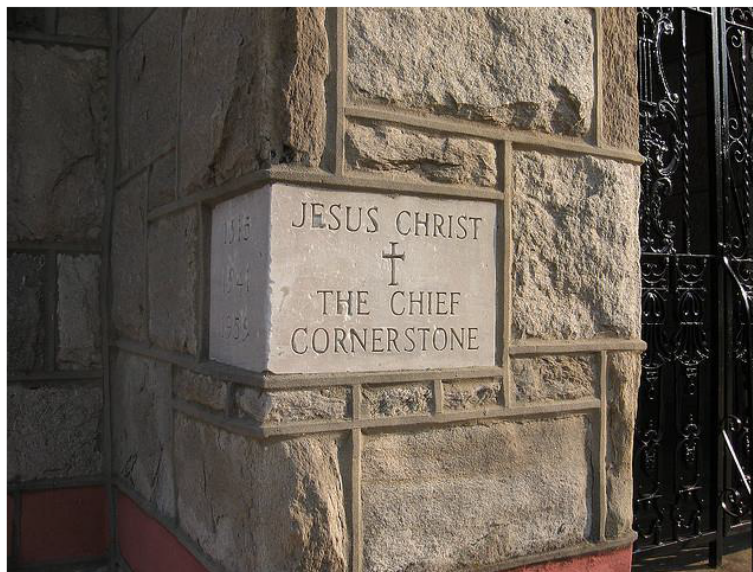
We are either in the process of resisting God's truth or in the process of being shaped and molded by his truth. - Charles Stanley

Day 28

Cornerstone or stumbling block

. . . Because they did not strive for it on the basis of faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone, . . . (Romans 9:32)

The “stone” (messiah) can be either a cornerstone that provides a firm foothold for a life of faith or a rock that gets in the way of getting our own way. We cannot use God to get our own way.



http://farm2.staticflickr.com/1374/757708294_7e21351ade_z.jpg

What is sacred among one people may be ridiculous in another; and what is despised or rejected by one cultural group, may in a different environment become the cornerstone for a great edifice of strange grandeur and beauty. - Hu Shih

Day 29

Confession leads us to hope

Because if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For one believes with the heart and so is justified, and one confesses with the mouth and so is saved. (Romans 10:9-10)

Beyond the fact that we will be saved, why is it important for us to confess with our lips that Jesus is Lord and believe that God raised him from the dead? As a short exercise today, say aloud twenty times, “Jesus, whom God raised him from the dead, is Lord.”



http://farm8.staticflickr.com/7168/6567050459_ee6fb76a74_z.jpg

“Faith is confirmed by the heart, confessed by the tongue, and acted upon by the body” – anonymous

Day 30

Kindness-because we all need it

Note then the kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's kindness toward you, provided you continue in his kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off. (Romans 11:22)

There are no categories in the Christian community; we are all miraculously "grafted" into God's olive tree. (from The Life with God Bible)



<http://4.bp.blogspot.com/-RrBpf7KAyAE/UmA54iL4kJI/AAAAAAAAARXU/dol-tM--zc/s640/rak4.jpg>

Be kind whenever possible. It is always possible. ~Tenzin Gyatso, 14th Dalai Lama

Day 31

Mystery – source of new energy and new hope for all.

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! (Romans 11:33)

Paul has been dealing with complex matters; he has done his best by vigorous reasoning and devout meditation on Scripture to bring Gentiles and Jews into a mutual awareness of community. But there is more: there is mystery. Mystery is not what is left over after we have done our best to figure things out on our own; it is inherent in the very nature of God and his works. (from The Life With God Bible)



<http://megoutlook.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/stingless-bee-hive-low-11-aug-2013.jpg>

This world of ours... must avoid becoming a community of dreadful fear and hate, and be, instead, a proud confederation of mutual trust and respect. - Dwight D. Eisenhower

Day 32

Fellowship . . . Building miracles together

For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same functions, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another. (Romans 12:4-5)

Fellowship is engaging with other disciples in the common activities of worship, study, prayer, celebration, and service, which sustain our life together and enlarge our capacity to experience more of God. (from The Life With God Bible)



http://www.flickr.com/photos/julien_harneis/4340707476/

“Fellowship is heaven, and lack of fellowship is hell; fellowship is life, and lack of fellowship is death; and the deeds that ye do upon the earth, it is for fellowship's sake that ye do them.”

William Morris quotes (British craftsman, early Socialist, Designer and Poet, whose designs generated the Arts and Crafts Movement in England. 1834-1896)

Day 33

Love – the power is in its truth and sincerity.

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. (Romans 12:9-10)

Everyone says they love, but not everyone loves in ways that transforms lives. God calls us to love so that we can love what we hate, hold on to good things, show affections that encourages and honor one another.



<http://www.marcandangel.com/images/tiny-love-stories.jpg>

Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength, while loving someone deeply gives you courage. - Lao Tzu

Day 34

Love your neighbor . . . love yourself

The commandments, “You shall not commit adultery; You shall not murder; You shall not steal; You shall not covet”; and any other commandment, are summed up in this word, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” (Romans 13:9)

We often think that to learn to love oneself is to focus on fulfilling own needs. Jesus told us way we learn to truly love oneself is by first learning to love others.



http://farm8.staticflickr.com/7182/6904269921_f98a6dcf40_z.jpg

“What most people need to learn in life is how to love people and use things instead of using people and loving things.” - anonymous

Day 35

Live in the present

Besides this, you know what time it is, how it is now the moment for you to wake from sleep. For salvation is nearer to us now than when we became believers. (Romans 13:11)

The present moment is the only time available to us for living in the *Spirit*, for following Jesus, for obeying his commands, for receiving the Father's love. We do not live the gospel in nostalgia, savoring past blessings; and we do not live in fantasy, anticipating a more convenient time. The time is now – sink into this present, this Presence. (from The Life With God Bible)



<http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-EKBBurduZb0/Tzw31oRdmpl/AAAAAAAAAKvE/z0jpIPHanJg/s1600/girls-10.jpg>

“The purpose of life is to live it, to taste experience to the utmost, to reach out eagerly and without fear for newer and richer experience.” — Eleanor Roosevelt

Day 36

Encouragement – kind words create one more smile in the world.

Why do you pass judgment on your brother and sister? Or you, why do you despise your brother or sister? For we will all stand before the judgment seat of God. (Romans 14:10)

Where have you seen fellowship destroyed by judgmental criticisms and gossip? Try this month to speak words of encouragement and hope that build community at every possible opportunity. (from The Life with God Bible)



http://farm5.staticflickr.com/4054/4268349392_ae9b9263de_z.jpg

“Flatter me, and I may not believe you. Criticize me, and I may not like you. Ignore me, and I may not forgive you. Encourage me, and I will not forget you. Love me and I may be forced to love you.” - William Arthur Ward (American dedicated scholar, author, editor, pastor and teacher)

Day 37

Self-improvement . . . more than just about me.

Let us therefore no longer pass judgment on one another, but resolve instead never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of another. (Romans 14:13)

Our motivation for self-improvement is to fill our own needs.
But true self-improvement is to become someone who can be help to another.



<http://qsen-interdisciplinaryteams.wikispaces.com/file/view/teamwork.jpg/319659388/teamwork.jpg>

Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress.

Working together is success. - Henry Ford

Day 38

Would you be my neighbor?

Each of us must please our neighbor for the good purpose of building up the neighbor. (Romans 15:2)

Do we think that the people with whom we worship should be “our kind” –affable and congenial fellow Christians who think well of us and make us feel at home? And if they do not please us, do we go off looking for others who will? This is a weak view of the Church, and certainly not what Christ experienced. Paul puts the shoe on the other foot: we are to be the ones out to please others. We come to church not to get our needs met, but to meet the needs of our neighbors. (from the Life with God Bible)



http://farm3.staticflickr.com/2769/4200815732_240933a1a8_z.jpg

I want you to be concerned about your next door neighbor. Do you know your next door neighbor? - Mother Teresa

Day 39

Service – makes others come closer to God.

**Nevertheless on some points I have written to you rather boldly by way of reminder, because of the grace given me by God to be a minister of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles in the priestly service of the gospel of God, so that the offering of the Gentiles may be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.
(Romans 15:15-16)**

Service is loving, thoughtful, active promotion of the good of others and the causes of God in our world, through which we experience the many little deaths of going beyond ourselves.
(from the Life with God Bible)



<http://poems.easybranches.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/love-bring-us-closer-together-easy-branches.png>

"How far that little candle throws his beams! So shines a good deed in a weary world." - William Shakespeare

Day 40

Recharge through fellowship.

I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to join me in earnest prayer to God on my behalf, that I may be rescued from the unbelievers in Judea. . . (Romans 15: 30-31a)

When we hear enough “voices of doubt”, we begin to believe in those voices. But when we are with fellow believers we will begin to hear God’s voice.



<http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-cyDm778LO9w/Tnl2zpV3Nfl/AAAAAAAAABw/J-0wduAR8RI/s1600/Solar+Lights+1.jpg>
<http://imgs.inkfrog.com/pix/depotzz/HG062-3.jpg>

“A healthy social life is found only, when in the mirror of each soul the whole community finds its reflection, and when in the whole community the virtue of each one is living” - Rudolf Steiner

Day 41

Good intentions but misguided.

I urge you, brothers and sisters, to keep an eye on those who cause dissensions and offenses, in opposition to the teaching that you have learned; avoid them. For such people do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the simple minded. (Romans 16:17-18)

We never think that we are the cause of conflict. But when there is a conflict in a community, we all are part of the problem is we are not part of the solution.



<http://athrun-zala.wikispaces.com/file/view/conflict.jpg/100873253/conflict.jpg>

“Whenever you're in conflict with someone, there is one factor that can make the difference between damaging your relationship and deepening it. That factor is attitude.” - William James quotes (American Philosopher and Psychologist, leader of the philosophical movement of Pragmatism, 1842-1910)

Day 42

Celebrate! God invited us all to share the mystery.

Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but is not disclosed . . . to the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be the glory forever! Amen. (Romans 16:25-27)



<http://www.ibspro.net/wp-content/uploads/2008/05/surprise.jpg>

“Nature is the true revelation of the Deity to man. The nearest green field is the inspired page from which you may read all that it is needful for you to know.” - Arthur Conan Doyle, Sr. quotes (Scottish writer, creator of the detective Sherlock Holmes, 1859-1930)

APPENDIX I

TIMOTHY

Introduction to 1 Timothy 1:12-17

1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus are known as the Pastoral Epistles because the author addresses the needs and responsibilities of the leaders of Christian communities. The styles and themes of these letters are so similar that many think they were written by the same person. Although they claim to be written by Paul, the structure of the church they show and the specific content of their teaching indicate that they were written a generation or so after Paul. 1 Timothy begins by emphasizing the importance of correct belief and by cautioning against false teachers. The leaders are mentioned as bishops, deacons and elders. The term used here for the coming of Christ is not found in Paul's letters but is common in pagan Greek writings. In those days, a writer sometimes honored an earlier leader by writing in his name.

1 Timothy 1:12-17

1:12 I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service,

1:13 even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief,

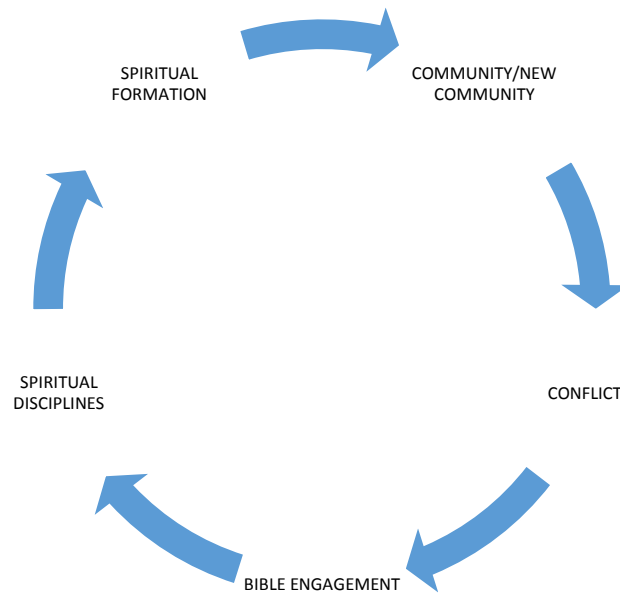
1:14 and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

1:15 The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners--of whom I am the foremost.

1:16 But for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience, making me an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life.

1:17 To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

APPENDIX J FLOW CHART



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